

# THE HERMIT OF THE ADIRONDACKS



DELLA TROMBLY





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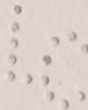




# THE HERMIT OF THE ADIRONDACKS

BY  
DELLA TROMBLY

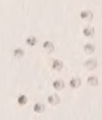
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THE HERMIT OF THE ADIRONDACKS







## CHAPTER I

### BLANCHE AND LESLIE

“Well, I have found you at last,” cried Leslie Lathrop, as he flung himself carelessly at Blanche’s feet. “I looked for you in the house and not finding you, concluded that you must be here. A pretty bird in a pretty nest. How handsome you look, Blanche,” he added, “in this bower of green foliage. Not a bad place either, considering the heat of the day.”

Blanche blushed sweetly at the compliment and coquettishly asked,

“Well, ‘Sir Knight,’ why did you seek me? To tell me that you think me handsome? A rather new phase in you, Leslie, I must say.”

“All the more to be appreciated, my ‘Fair Lady,’ considering that I am not given to flattery. But, Blanche, to be frank, it was not to praise your beauty that I sought you, but to talk to you about something I have been thinking of for some time.”

Blanche’s heart bounded with pleasure. Had the longed-for hour arrived? Was Leslie about to ask her to become his wife?

“You know,” continued Leslie, “that we have made arrangements to go to Newport; but I have



changed my mind. It is but going from one fashionable place to another, with the same round of worldly gaieties. One meets the same type of handsome, well dressed young lady and the inevitable mama. I am tired of it all and long for a change, where I will not be bored with conventionality. I have made up my mind to go to the Adirondacks and try my skill in sketching. You know I paint tolerably well and the scenery there is unsurpassed. Besides, there is hunting and fishing. Mrs. Moore has promised to chaperone you to Newport. No doubt you will have a delightful time. And," he added, half in earnest, half in jest, "mind you do not turn as many poor fellows' heads as you did last summer. You are a little hard on your adorers." Blanche's lips curled in contempt.

"What care I for the moths whose wings get scorched? They fly to the light uninvited."

Leslie started at the hard tones of her voice.

"Surely," thought he, "I meant no offense." He concluded it best to drop the subject of lovers, and hastened to say:

"Blanche, we are drifting from the question. Tell me what you think of my proposed excursion?"

Blanche, whose darling hope had been so suddenly dashed to the ground, felt vexed and disappointed, but being a good actress, she concealed her feelings. There was no regret, no anger in her voice when she answered.



"Well, Leslie, I cannot but approve of your plan, and shall certainly enjoy myself at Newport. You say you are tired of the well dressed beauties of New York and the watering places. Who knows but you may be lucky enough to meet your ideal among the mountains — some genuine Indian maiden in all the originality of her race, with whom to fall irresistibly in love at the first glance? Such things have happened in stories. It would be in accord with your taste for the unconventional."

Blanche burst into a peal of mellow laughter in which Leslie heartily joined.

"Well, how can we tell how near the truth you are hitting. If I meet my fate on the mountains and it be in the shape of a dusky maid, perhaps I may prevail on her to discard moccasins and blankets and bring her home for you to educate."

"O Leslie!" cried Blanche, holding up her hands in dismay; "do not carry the jest farther. It is too horrible even to joke about."

"Well then, let us put joking aside. When I marry, my wife must be young, beautiful, educated and good. Do you think I can find such a divinity?"

"That depends upon your standard of estimation. I know of many young ladies who possess those qualities to quite an extent," responded Blanche, as rising from her seat she went toward the house. When they reached the mansion, Leslie stopped and said good night, telling her he



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would not return home that evening, as his business would detain him in town till late. Blanche bade him good-bye and flitted up the high stone steps and disappeared within. Then Leslie turned abruptly and started on a rapid walk to catch the down town train.

“I am glad Blanche did not take it into her head that I must escort her to Newport. I promised my dying mother to be a brother to her, and I mean to be; but I must cut loose from her apron strings once in a while. Besides, it is not right to stay by; there are scores of young men ready to offer heart and hand, which my constant companionship keeps aloof. She will make a magnificent woman; but were she ten times more beautiful, I never could love her as I hope to love the woman I make my wife. I will be glad when she is safely married, for then my guardianship ends.”

So mused this handsome, frank young man of twenty-five, on whom nature had lavished her fairest gifts — health, position, and good looks, as well as a vast fortune from his parents, both of whom were dead. A considerable sum of money had been bestowed by Mrs. Lathrop on her adopted daughter Blanche, sufficient to make her quite an heiress; but the girl was not happy.

When Blanche had gained the seclusion of her room, she took a seat before the large mirror. She examined her face critically. It was a beautiful woman that she saw reflected there.

“I am handsome, yet what avails beauty if it



fails to gain for me the love for which I would barter my soul. This is what he said, 'My wife must be young, beautiful, educated and good.' I could be all that. Yes, I would even try to be good for his sake. But how wicked I could be should he ever prefer another to me! I could almost kill any one who should dare come between me and Leslie. But I am alarming myself unnecessarily. Because I expected him to propose to-day and he did not, it does not signify that he never will. He will — he *must* love me in time! Perhaps it is as well he should go away awhile. Whom can he meet in that wild region to cause me any alarm. I can go to Newport and enjoy myself. He will be safe among the mountains."



## CHAPTER II

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Scarcely had Blanche finished these reflections, when she heard a quick, nervous rap at her door. She made haste to admit the caller; for she recognized the peculiar tap. A queer figure of a woman, dressed in an oriental costume, glided into the apartment. It was old Madgee, who had been Blanche's nurse in her childhood and was now her confidant and companion.

"What is it, Madgee?" enquired Blanche, as she noticed the excited manner of her swarthy friend, whose small black eyes peered cautiously around the room. Seeing no one, she bent her turbaned head and whispered in her mistress' ear something which caused the latter to turn pale.

"Oh, Madgee!" cried Blanche, "what shall I do? To come just when I least wish to see her! Thank goodness! Leslie is not here. Speak, nurse!" Then suddenly seizing Madgee by the wrist, she said,

"Go down and tell her I cannot see her! Say I am sick, anything! so long as she goes away and leaves me alone!"

"I told her you, not well; but Jane say you



come only minutes ago. Woman not take excuse and want to see you much, only one minute."

"Stay, Madgee! I will go and see that *she* goes away. The servants must not know she is my mother."

And she went to meet the anxiously waiting woman. A shudder of repulsion ran through her frame when her eyes fell upon the poorly clad being, who claimed to be her mother. Blanche offered no word of greeting; but merely suffered her to kiss her cold cheek. A pang shot through the woman's heart as she noticed the coldness of her daughter, but she made no sign. Blanche remained standing and said in a frigid voice,

"There was an agreement between you and Mamma Lathrop, that you would never come here and seek me. If it is money you want, take this," emptying the contents of her purse in her mother's lap, "take it and go!"

If Blanche was white, the mother was deathly.

"Is this the way my child receives me after the sacrifice I made for her? You have your father's heartless nature, and can be as cruel. Yes, I will go. Your poor hardworking mother is no fit companion for such a fine lady as you are."

"Listen," cried Blanche, a little touched by the stinging reproach, "I would keep you with me if I could. But were young Mr. Lathrop to see you, my prospects for life would be ruined. If you value my future, leave me!"

The mother said not another word. She cast a



lingering look at her daughter; but much as her heart yearned for her sympathy, she would not beg for it. Rising from her seat, she let the silver fall to the floor untouched, and walked slowly out upon the street. Blanche then returned to Madgee, whom she found waiting to know the result of the interview. She heaved a sigh of relief as she remarked,

“She will not trouble me again. She has no claims upon me. Mamma Lathrop showed me the writings which made me her child, and the woman’s written promise. Tell me Madgee! what did the woman mean? She hinted at the cruelty of my father — Do you know anything about him?”

Seeing that Madgee was reluctant to speak, she said,

“Tell me — do not fear! What do you know about my miserable parents?”

“Oh, deary, why don’t ee let past alone? It’s no good Madgee can tell ee of your father.”

“I do not care. I must know.”

Madgee then told how Mrs. Lathrop had adopted Blanche soon after the death of her own little daughter. How badly the mother had felt at parting with her child, because Mrs. Lathrop had exacted the promise that she would never come to visit her. The extreme poverty of the woman had compelled her to make the sacrifice, believing it would be for the welfare of her little girl. She had a boy older than Blanche. She took in wash-



ings for a living, while the husband was serving a life term in prison.

“The child of a convict and a washer-woman!” cried Blanche bitterly. “That will do, Madgee. You need tell me no more. Go now!”

Madgee left with as stealthy a step as she had entered.

Blanche, left to herself, resumed her hateful reflections, made still more bitter by old Madgee’s words. Despite the vexations of the day, of one thing she was glad. Leslie was absent from home that night. It gave her no sorrow that her out-cast mother was roaming the streets of New York, friendless and perhaps destitute of means to obtain food or lodgings.



## CHAPTER III

### STARTLING REVELATIONS

Leslie returned in time to see Blanche off for Newport, accompanied by Mrs. Moore, her daughters, and her strange attendant, Madgee.

After wishing the gay party good-bye, Leslie hastily packed his travelling-bag and took the train for the Adirondacks. When he reached his destination, he established himself at a little inn among the mountains. It was at a time when but few visited the out-of-the-way place.

Leslie met with rather a hard looking crew the evening of his arrival. One young man among them drew his attention, by his flashy dress and air of lawless bravado. His companions looked upon him in the light of a superior; but Leslie set him down at once as a rough character. Later in the evening, his suspicions were still farther roused by many significant winks and motions which the fellow exchanged with his companions, who called him Sharky Dandy. Presently, the latter advanced to where Leslie sat and boldly addressed him.

“ Mr. —— I see you are a stranger here. Of course, you’ll say it’s none of my business, but



what's the object of your coming, and where do you hail from? ”

Leslie's first thought was to decline answering, then he changed his mind. Some impulse prompted him to substitute his middle name for that of Lathrop.

“ My name is Hargrave,” he replied. “ I come from New York. I am an artist in search of sport and scenery, and I think I have struck the right place.”

“ There's where your head is level!” said Sharky Dandy, emphasizing his words by a familiar tap on Leslie's shoulder. “ Can't find a better place in all the wide world, if that's what you're after.”

He then marched back to the group, who had watched his movements with open-mouthed wonder at his boldness.

Finally, they disbanded, only Sharky Dandy and one of his companions remaining at the tavern. The host, Mr. Spinks, who had been absent, now returned, telling Leslie that his room was ready. They went through a narrow corridor, ascended a flight of steep, dark stairs, which landed them in an ill-lighted hall, on each side of which were the sleeping apartments of the inn. Mr. Spinks conducted Leslie to the door of his, at the farther end of the hall, wished him good night and withdrew.

No sooner was Leslie alone, than he proceeded to investigate his quarters. He shrugged his shoulders as he contemplated his present surroundings.



"Well!" he ejaculated, "I have chosen and must be reconciled." He examined the door; and, to his dismay, found it did not lock.

"A pretty fix, with that set of cut-throats down there. I believe the old cat of a host is in league with the ruffians; for scoundrels they surely are. If it is my money they are after, it is precious little they will find." He proceeded to close the door as well as he could, placed a chair against it, then took from his pocket a large purse well stuffed with bank-notes. In a corner of the room was an old stool, the covering of which was worn through. Into this he thrust his pocketbook, leaving only a few dollars in his pants pocket.

"There," thought he, "if they want this, they can have it." Then taking his sketch-book out of his bag, he laid it on the table and went to bed. For a long time he was restless; but, at last, overcome by fatigue, he fell into a deep sleep and did not waken until morning. He looked about the room to ascertain if he had been visited through the night; but the chair was leaning precisely in the same way in which he had placed it against the door. The hidden pocket-book was just as he had tucked it in the stool. He laughed at his unnecessary alarm and precaution. Nothing had been disturbed. It was easy now in broad daylight, with no harm done, to laugh at the fears of the preceding night. His toilet made, he went down-stairs. His host announced that breakfast would not be ready for half an hour, so Leslie



sauntered out to get a breath of air. It was a lovely morning, and the young artist revelled in the scene before him. After breakfast, he received direction from Mr. Spinks where to find the fishing pond, and started out for a day's sport, equipped with lines, bait, lunch-basket and sketch-book. He fished a while, rambled a while; then coming to a secluded nook by the water's edge, took out his sketch-book and commenced sketching the gorgeous scene before him. He did not return to the inn until after sun-down. It was very quiet at the little tavern. Leslie saw no signs of the men who had aroused such suspicions in him the night previous. He went up to his room early to write to Blanche and other friends. After he had finished his letters, he drew his chair close to the little window. The full moon looked down upon the mountains, bathing their summits in silvery splendor. The solitude and perfect quiet filled Leslie's soul with awe. He looked at his watch, it lacked a quarter of ten. He longed to be out, enjoying the scene beyond. In a moment, he was down stairs and out again, in the open air.

Naturally, his steps took him in the direction of the pond which he had visited through the day. He walked on, taking no note of time until he had almost reached it. There was the little cove in which he had spent part of the day. He sat down to watch the reflections of the moon dancing upon the waters. A little boat came out of the shadows on the opposite side of the pond, but not until he



heard the sound of the oars did it attract his notice. It was coming directly toward him. Something in the attitude of one of its occupants reminded him of the man called Sharky Dandy. Leslie's curiosity was aroused. He concealed himself in a clump of bushes at the entrance of the cove. The boat landed near by; but Leslie was screened from the view of the occupants, who at once sprang ashore. As the light fell on their faces, it revealed the well remembered features of Sharky Dandy and his favorite companion of the night before.

"The scoundrels are here for no good purpose," he thought.

"What is it you have to tell?" demanded Sharky's companion.

"Well, here it goes," responded the other. "You have seen Lestrangle's pretty girl. I have made up my mind to have her. I asked her to marry me, and she refused; but mine she shall be! I've set my heart on that girl and must win. If she will not be a willing bride, then she shall be a forced one. I want you to be on the lookout. Get the cave ready for her reception! If you do the job neatly, you shall have an extra share of our last find. That was quite a haul as you know."

Leslie's ears strained to catch every sound. In all probability, these were the men who, only a week before, had committed that bold robbery in the very heart of New York. And who was the girl



against whom they were forming such an infamous plot?

“I say, Sharky, how much will you give me if I do the job in good shape, get the girl all safe in the den?”

“Dunno as I need any help, Bob. It would be easy enough to secure her myself; but if you do the capturing, it will throw suspicion off me. Once I have her in my power, I will curb her haughty spirit — Don’t be in a hurry, Bob! I mean to give the girl one more chance. If she refuses me again, secure the prize and I will make it an extra thousand.”

“Give us your hand on that, Sharky,” said Bob. “Sleep easy and don’t worry! But thank my jambereens! that was a pretty haul we made at that bank in New York. Wonder how many hounds are set on our tracks? But we can defy the whole kit of ’em. Talk to me of shrewd detectives! They would have to get help from the devil himself to catch us. What in thunder made you go and talk to that sap-head last night? Did you suspect him of being one of the law-whelps?”

“Well, yes,” said Sharky, grinning, “I kinder thought he might be one of their pups on our tracks; but his answer showed quite the contrary. Told me he was from New York — that was enough. To make sure, I went into his room last night. There he lay on his back, mouth wide-open, fast asleep. Catch a detective asleep with



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such as we in the same house! To be sure of him, I just slapped the handkerchief over his gaping mouth,—and I was safe to rummage. I opened his bag, found only a few traps, no wigs or anything of the kind. He's a poor goody-goody. Had only a few dollars in his pants pocket. He's no game for us. On his table was an old sketch-book. I didn't bother to look at it. It would have made a horse laugh to see me set up the chair against the door, just as greeny had fixed it. Don't suppose he mistrusted anything." Bob's laugh grated harshly on the listener's ears. It was not very appetizing to be ridiculed in this fashion.

"Well, now that we understand each other, we will go," said Sharky. "Remember, Bob, about the girl! If she shows fight, use no violence; but give her a sniff of the same greeny had last night! Sometimes, she comes to the pond for her walk. You must be on the lookout for her."

"I understand," answered Bob. So saying, they made the boat more secure, by hauling it up farther on the shore, and then they started in the direction of the inn.

Leslie waited until they were well out of sight, then got up from his cramped position and followed.

"Ah, ha!! my fine fellows, so you are no game for greeny — We shall see."

He had no difficulty in reaching his room unobserved; for the landlord was wont to leave the doors



open at night in warm weather. Leslie smiled as he thought of Sharky's stolen visit to him.

"Lucky for me that I hid my money. The rascal was outwitted after all. No use going through that performance again, since they think me poor. I am safe enough for a while; but I have fallen into a nest of villains. To-morrow, I will telegraph my news to the detective force." Then, his thoughts reverted to the young girl who stood in grievous peril. Would they dare carry their plan into execution?



## CHAPTER IV

### MABEL LESTRANGE

Leslie was up early the next morning; but saw nothing of the two rascals who had passed the night there. He dared not question his host, for it might arouse suspicion, so ate his breakfast in silence. His meal finished, he enquired the distance to the nearest postoffice.

"Six miles," responded Mr. Spinks.

"Have you a horse that I may hire?"

"Certainly; when do you want it?"

"Immediately."

"Well, I let my best rig go this morning; but I have another, if you can put up with the slow gait of old Fan?"

"No matter, so long as I get there in time to post my letters."

In less than a quarter of an hour he was off. He could not help laughing to see himself so equipped. He wondered if his city friends would recognize him, were they to meet him. No, he felt sure they would not. They would pass him by for a fisherman on his way to market. What would Blanche say? No doubt she would tell him all he lacked was the Indian maid to complete the



rustic picture. While musing on his appearance, driving that slow nag hitched to the squeaky old wagon, the sound of approaching wheels came to his ear. A carriage with two men in it was coming. He recognized them as Sharky Dandy and Bob. They nodded to him, and he heard their ill-suppressed laughter.

"They think me an escaped lunatic," mused Leslie; "but what care I. It only pulls the wool closer over their eyes. Little do they suspect that greeny is going to inform the police against them."

Finally, he reached the railway station. The hamlet comprised a tavern and a general merchandise store, in which the post office was kept. He posted his letters, made a few purchases, then sought the telegraph office. The operator opened his eyes in astonishment when he read,

"To detective S——: The sharpers you are in search of for the robbery of N—— Bank, are here in hiding. They drop in now and then at a tavern kept by Samuel Spinks. Come at once and secure them!

"LESLIE LATHROP,  
"H. Station N. Y."

After cautioning the operator to be on his guard, Leslie went back to the inn. Sharky and Bob were not there. They had already gone.

About four o'clock, our hero went again to while away a few hours at the pond. Not being in a mood for sketching, he started for a ramble.



Walking some distance through thick shrubbery, the heat being excessive, he threw himself down to rest and fell asleep. On awaking, he found the sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and being dazed, could not remember the direction from whence he had come. He looked around in a bewildered fashion and espied the little path near him.

"I have it now!" thought he. "I came from the south,—there is where the sun set—this must be the way." He started along the little pathway. The shadows of night were already creeping over the landscape, yet he did not come upon the pond. Had he taken the wrong course after all? He drew out his watch. It was almost nine o'clock.

"I certainly have lost my way," thought he. On and on, he went, when suddenly he saw a light through the trees. Finally, as he advanced he found it was no false beacon. The path led him directly to a clearing, in the midst of which stood a handsome cottage. He advanced still closer, till through the window he could see a man reading. By the table sat a woman engaged with some needlework. He walked around to the front door, and was about to rap to enquire the way to the pond when glancing to the right, he saw, not a quarter of a mile distant, the object of his search.

"I will not disturb the family. Once I reach the pond, I can soon retrace my steps."

He followed a nicely cleared road that led to the water's edge. He perceived that he was on the opposite side of the pond from his lodgings. By



the light of the moon he could define well remembered objects across the water.

“If I only had a boat to cross — I have half a mind to go and see if I cannot get one of the gentleman at the house.” Just then, he fancied he heard the sound of voices not far distant. He listened. Surely he was not mistaken. He advanced to a clump of bushes which skirted the pond. The voices were more audible. A large boulder hid the speakers from view. Going a few steps out from the shore, he came in full sight of a man and woman.

In an attitude of utter despair, stood a young girl, her face upturned imploringly to the man, who held her wrists in a vise-like grip.

“Let me go!” she pleaded. “Please let me go! Why do you persecute me so?”

“No, you don’t, my pretty one,” replied her brutal companion. “I will not part with you till you promise to be my wife.”

“Your wife I never will be! I will die first.”

“Not so glib, my pretty! my wife you *shall* be. I am as sure of it as I am of the kiss I’ll now take from your sweet lips.”

The girl shrieked as she struggled in the arms of her persecutor. Just as he was about to desecrate her with unholy touch, his head was suddenly jerked backward. An iron hand was upon his throat, and in an instant he was writhing in a heap on the ground.

“There! you cowardly ruffian!!” roared Leslie,



his eyes blazing with indignation and contempt. "You dastardly brute!! take that!— and that," administering several sound blows upon the astonished villain, while the frightened girl looked on with gratitude and amazement.

"Oh, ho!" sneered Sharky Dandy, when he stood once more upon his feet. A sinister frown crossed his dark brow as he recognized his assailant. "So greeny has turned out to be a spy after all."

"Yes!" shouted Leslie, "an unintentional one. However, I am glad I was in time to balk you in your fiendish work."

Sharky bit his lip in rage.

"You shall pay dearly for your interference," he hissed, a murderous light coming in his eyes. He thrust his hand quickly in his breast-pocket, drew out a shining revolver and levelled it at Leslie's head.

"Die!" he thundered.

Our hero, who was on guard, saw his danger. With cat-like swiftness he sprang upon his would-be murderer, seizing the arm which held the deadly weapon. There was a fierce struggle. Leslie's skill and stalwart strength brought down his adversary. In the fight, the revolver went off, the report ringing out sharply on the still night air. An oath followed by a deep groan issued from Sharky's lips, and then he lay bleeding and insensible upon the ground. Leslie's attention was then directed to the girl, who had also fallen into a



deep swoon. Where could he take her? He be-thought himself of the cottage not far away. He raised her in his arms, and went towards it. How fair was his burden! Her long golden hair, which had loosened from its confinement in her struggle with the ruffian, lay scattered on his shoulder. She was but a feather's weight in his powerful arms as he hurried on toward the house. He soon reached it and knocked for admittance. Mr. Lestrangle, its owner, came to the door. A pallor overspread his features on seeing his insensible daughter in the arms of a stranger.

"My darling child! what has happened to her?"

"Calm yourself, my dear sir," reassuringly spoke Leslie. "Your daughter has suffered no serious harm."

The father quickly led the way to a sofa where the young man gently deposited his fair burden.

"Mrs. Grant!" called Mr. Lestrangle to the housekeeper, who had retired. "Mrs. Grant! Mabel is ill." The woman was quickly downstairs. Leslie was kneeling beside his late charge, chafing her hands, while her father bathed her temples with cold water. Mrs. Grant was a strong woman; but the sight of her young mistress lying so pale and still distressed her greatly. She hastened to the cupboard for restoratives, forcing a little between the girl's teeth.

"Where did you find my darling?" asked Mr. Lestrangle.



In a few words Leslie told how he had come across Mabel and her persecutor — the timely rescue, and that he had left the villain dead, to all appearance, through the accidental discharge of his own revolver.

“The villain!” exclaimed the enraged father. “Shooting is too good for him!”

“Hush!” whispered the housekeeper. “She is reviving.”

Presently Mabel’s large hazel eyes opened. She looked around her in a dazed way. Memory rushed back upon her. A shudder ran through her frame and she closed her eyes as if to shut out the painful recollection.

“You are safe in your own home, my darling, and have nothing to fear, thanks to this young gentleman who so nobly defended you.”

Mabel’s large dreamy eyes opened again; this time they rested upon her preserver. A smile lighted up her lovely face and the beautiful eyes expressed her gratitude.

Never before, even in his dreams, had Leslie seen her equal. It was more than beauty of face and form, for nobility of heart and soul shone through the outward expression of inward grace. His heart went out in glad surrender.

Mr. Lestrangle’s anxiety concerning his daughter being abated, he hastened to offer his thanks to the young man.

“You have rendered a service which I can never repay. My name is Lestrangle. Pray tell me, to



whom I am indebted for the safety of my daughter? ”

“ I am Leslie Lathrop, of New York, and have only done my duty. Any one would have done the same, under the circumstances. A more interesting subject is the fellow I left on the ground. We ought to secure him living or dead. The name Sharky is very appropriate for such a fellow.”

“ True,” said Mr. Lestrangle. “ But tell me, Mabel,” turning to his daughter, “ where did the fellow come from? ”

“ I do not know, papa. I went to my favorite seat by the pond,— the evening was so beautiful, and I had never been disturbed while there, so was not afraid. I did not even think to take Watch with me. John Drew came upon me all of a sudden.”

“ John Drew !! ” exclaimed her father. “ Mabel, do I hear aright? Is it possible? ”

“ Yes, papa, it was he.”

“ Then I am to understand that the man Mr. Lathrop designates by the name of Sharky and this John Drew are one and the same. Heaven help me! I have warmed a serpent, and the reptile has turned and bitten the hand that has nursed it. Duped once more! I should have known better.”

Suddenly he checked himself — Meanwhile, Leslie was trying to recollect where he had heard that name. Why did it sound familiar to him?



“John Drew,—J-o-h-n D-r-e-w,” he mused.

“Come, Mr. Lathrop,” said Mr. Lestrangle, “you are right—the fellow must be captured. I am burning to lay my hands on one who has abused my hospitality by a most cowardly act. We must not go unarmed,” he wisely suggested.

Going out of the room, he soon returned with a pair of handsome revolvers, well loaded.

“We cannot be too cautious. Ten chances to one if our Shark is not now lying in wait for your return.” Then, stooping down, he patted a large mastiff that had been watching the scene with intelligent eyes and was briskly wagging his tail.

“No, Watch, you cannot come this time. You must stay here and guard your mistress. Mrs. Grant,” he added on leaving, “lock and bolt all the doors securely after us.—With Watch for a sentinel you can defy a whole *school of Sharks*.”

Cautiously the two men hurried on until they reached the spot where Leslie had left John Drew mortally wounded as he supposed. What was their consternation to find him gone!

“Well,” cried Mr. Lestrangle. “The vulture has flown. But mark me, Mr. Lathrop, he shall atone to me for his base conduct. To have been once more so cruelly imposed upon! Oh, the perfidy of man!” Again he checked himself.

“What trouble Mr. Lestrangle has gone through,” thought Leslie. “He has suffered terribly.”

His noble brow was marked with deep lines of



care,— his hair was white as snow, though to all other appearance he could not be over forty-five years of age. What possible sorrow had driven him to choose this out-of-the-way place for himself and daughter? — These questions rushed upon Leslie in a moment, for he was keen of perception. His heart warmed towards the man of many griefs. He longed to offer sympathy, and he hastened to say,

“I do not blame you for wishing to bring the fellow to justice for his crime. I shall do all in my power to help you; but seeing no way of doing anything more now, as he has given us the slip, I bid you good night.”

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Lestrangle, “you do not purpose going back to your boarding place to-night? You must not think of it. Undoubtedly that assassin is concealed and means to way-lay you, should you return. Take my advice and come back with me.”

Leslie, who was as fearless as he was chivalrous, replied,

“Many thanks for your consideration, but I think I will be safe in returning, since he suspects me of being a detective. He has undoubtedly gone now to warn his associates.”

Mr. Lestrangle shook his head thoughtfully; but seeing Leslie was determined to go, said no more to dissuade him.

Although it was very late, Leslie was surprised to see a light in the bar-room and, on coming



nearer, heard sounds of laughter and loud singing. He peered through the partially open door. There was the same crew he had seen on the night of his arrival; but he noticed that Sharky Dandy was not among them. He stole up to his room unobserved; for the men were too intoxicated to pay any attention to him. He was disturbed by their wild revelry until nearly daylight.

“You will not feel quite so jolly in a few hours, if nothing happens,” thought Leslie. He snatched a couple of hours’ sleep, then rose, hastily dressed himself, and went down stairs.

The drunken men lay huddled upon the dirty bar-room floor, their heavy breathing resounding through the room. He likened them to the herd of swine he had seen the day previous, covered to the ears in the mire and snoring complacently. Thinking how low these men had fallen, he went forth into the early morning light.



## CHAPTER V

### SHARKY ELUDES THE LAW

Leslie had gone but a short distance, when from the direction of H. Station, he saw a wagon coming with four men in it. He guessed at once who they were, and signalled them to stop. Among them was the constable of H. Station, whom Leslie met the day before. He hastily told them the state of affairs at the inn, and of his encounter with their chief.

The capture of the men at the inn was accomplished easily, in their intoxicated condition. The innkeeper had not time to recover from his surprise ere the whole gang was hand-cuffed, bound, and a guard set to watch them. A diligent search was then made for Sharky Dandy, which proved fruitless.

Leslie took them to the place where he left him wounded. There was the pool of blood that had flowed from the wound, but besides this nothing could be found. The earth might have opened and swallowed him, for all the traces he had left behind. The search was most thorough, Mr. Lestrangle acting as guide. At length they were forced to abandon it, and left with their prisoners



for New York, a detective remaining behind on the look-out for Sharky Dandy.

Meanwhile what had become of the sharp villain? He lay insensible some time; but with returning consciousness came the knowledge of his defeat. A fearful oath burst from his lips, and through his clenched teeth he hissed:

"I swear by all the powers above and beneath to be revenged! That spy and sneak shall pay for crossing my path. If need be, I will search the world over to find him and when we come face to face, it will not be Sharky who bites the dust."— His left arm pained him terribly. He arose to a sitting posture, and examined it. The blood was dripping from an ugly wound — However, it was a relief to know that his arm was not broken. He bound it up as well as he could with his handkerchief, which partially stopped the flow of blood. Then taking his light coat he wrapped that also around his arm. Picking up his weapon he started off muttering.

"Let the hounds follow my tracks if they can. Bob will tell me I ought not to have fooled with the jade."

Sharky hurried on till he reached a little hut which to all appearance had been merely a temporary dwelling for wood-cutters, and had not been used for years. There was no door, no windows, nothing to indicate that it was inhabited. He peered cautiously about, then hurried in. He went to a corner of the room, raised some loose



rubbish which lay piled up there, and stooping down rapped loudly three times, then listened. As if by magic, a portion of the floor in front of him was raised a trifle, sufficiently to allow him to admit his hand. Then he raised the trap door and slipped through the aperture, pulling the door down after him. He descended steps leading down into a dark passage. There he struck a match. By its faint light, he picked his way to the end of it, and opened a door. Here he overtook an old woman, holding a lighted lamp in her claw-like hand. Had she lived in the days of witch-craft, she might have passed for a witch. Her gray hair was disheveled and hung loosely over her shoulders. Her form was shrunken and her face horribly wrinkled. As the light fell on the pale face of the robber and she saw how the coat which wrapped his arm was soaked with blood, she humped herself in terror, hurriedly asking what the matter was.

Sharky Dandy sank upon a chair, faint from loss of blood. Fear of being captured had impelled him onward unmindful of the fatigue; but now that he was safe, the reaction came. Strength was still in his tongue.

“Mind your business; you old fool!” he growled. “Can’t you see I’m hurt? Bring me some brandy, I say!”

The crone hobbled away as fast as she could, and soon returned with a bottle and a glass. She poured out a glassful of the liquor and Sharky drained it at one draught. This somewhat re-



vived him. Then he called for some linen and with old Meg's help washed and bound the wounded arm. On inquiry, he was alarmed to learn that his band had not returned.

"The boys are on a tear," he thought. "What if they don't come back to-night? A pretty boat they will be in. And I cannot go to warn them. No doubt that spy will get them caught." Then there was another round of oaths.— He was too exhausted to worry much about others. The pain being somewhat alleviated, he lay down on the bed Meg prepared, and calling for more brandy, fell asleep.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE MOUNTAIN MAID

The next morning, Leslie called on Mr. Lestrangle to enquire about his daughter's welfare. He was received like an old friend. Mabel graciously offered her hand, a flush of roses mantling her cheek. Leslie's heart thrilled with pleasure as he pressed it.

"I am glad your adventure left no bad results."

"Beyond an awful fright, I suffered nothing, thanks to your brave kindness," she said.

As Leslie saw more of Mr. Lestrangle and Mabel, he marvelled at their seclusion.

"Why is it so much talent and beauty are buried here?" he queried mentally.

Leslie told them of himself, of his love of sketching and scenery. Mr. Lestrangle then said Mabel was fond of art, and that it had always been her wish to take lessons in drawing from nature; but the opportunity had not been easy to find.

Of course it was only natural that Leslie should offer to teach her. Hence it was agreed that he should come to the cottage and give her lessons.

Toward evening Mr. Lestrangle showed Leslie over his grounds. Everything bore marks of



means, culture and fine taste. The conversation drifted to the wounded robber. He certainly could not remain in hiding long, wounded and without food. He must soon seek help and refuge. Surely the able detective left to trace him would find him.

"I must tell you," said Mr. Lestrangle, "how we became acquainted with him. Two months ago, while rambling on the mountains, I found him with his foot caught fast in a fissure of a rock. He could not extricate himself. In all probability he would have died there, had I not happened to find him. To get his foot out, I was obliged to break in pieces the rock which held him. He suffered a good deal during the operation; but at last I got him free. I brought him home and nursed him until he was well. You have seen how he has repaid me. Mabel detested him from the first, and when he made bold to speak to her of love, she spurned him, and I forbade him entering my house."

Mr. Lestrangle would not hear of Leslie's going away before tea.

"Do not stand on ceremony here. We are not bothered with much of it in these wilds."

Leslie was only too glad to remain, for already Mabel had a great fascination for him. Indeed, he was already in love with the maiden. His rescue of her had brought these two souls nearer together than years of fashionable drawing-room receptions. After tea the three went to the small



parlor. Mabel played and sang. Her voice was rich and sweet and charmed her listeners. Leslie's face revealed his delight. Mr. Lestrangle, having noticed his visitor's pleased surprise, said,

"From our surroundings, one might suppose us a semi-barbaric family; but it is not quite as bad as that. Though buried alive here, we have had musical advantages. In my youthful days I was quite a musician. We are quite content — is it not so, Mabel?"

"We are very happy, papa."

"One would have to meet you but once to know the fact," said Leslie. "I thank you for the great pleasure your music has given me, and will now bid you good night."



## CHAPTER VII

### BLANCHE'S LETTER

Leslie about this time received a letter from Blanche. It gave a vivid description of the merry times she was having at Newport; but also expressed her regret that he was not there to enjoy them too.

"It is better than last year. I had almost forgotten how tired you are of pretty women and gay parties. Perhaps you will thank your stars you did not come, when you hear that there are even more beauties than last season."

"I'll wager that not one can compare with my little mountain maid," thought Leslie. "Yes, I am thankful I did not go. I have found the jewel my heart yearns for. If I can ever win her, my worldly happiness will be complete. I am glad Blanche is enjoying herself. Fancy her in Miss Lestrangle's place! She would die of *ennui*."

There were letters from other friends beside Blanche.

So time went on. Leslie occupied himself with hunting, fishing and making love to sweet Mabel Lestrangle.

Later came another letter from Blanche, saying Mrs. Moore was ill and would have to return to



her city home. Unless Leslie would join her in Newport, she would have to go with Mrs. Moore and her daughters.

“But, Leslie, do not come if you have not finished your sketching. I have been quite long enough, and would as soon go home as to remain. O Leslie! I have forgotten to mention it to you before; but there is such a lovely woman here. Let me see if I can tell you how beautiful she is! No, I never can. She has lovely hair, beautiful dark, hazel eyes, a complexion fair as a lily. It is altogether such a sweet, sad face, too. The men are raving about her beauty; but she treats them with proud indifference. She neither speaks nor makes friends with any one. She is attended by a woman as close-mouthed as her mistress. I think there have been some sad pages in her history. We young girls are thrown entirely in the shade by the dazzling beauty of this superb woman.”

“She must be very handsome indeed, for Blanche to talk so much about it. Were the lady eighteen instead of older, and happy instead of sad, I should say she is a good likeness of Mabel Lestrangle.”

“Time flies on golden wings.” Summer faded into early fall, and still Leslie lingered on near Mabel. No clue had been found of the missing robber. His disappearance baffled all, especially Mr. Lestrangle. He never tired of searching for him,—he longed to have the miscreant brought to justice.



As for Leslie, though he condemned Sharky Dandy for his base deed, he felt he owed his meeting with Mabel to him.

“I cannot blame the fellow for falling in love with your daughter,” he once remarked to Mr. Lestrangle, “though he need not have adopted such a savage way of wooing. The worst criminals often love the purest and fairest women.”

Leslie had told Mr. Lestrangle the conversation he had overheard between Sharky and his companion on the evening previous to Mabel's adventure; but it was carefully kept from her. In vain had they searched the mountains for the cave to which Sharky alluded. The detective had been told, and the three had together looked for it. More than once they had entered the wood cutters' hut; but never had they supposed that it was the entrance to the robbers' cave. They still had hopes of capturing Sharky; but his tracks were well covered. In cunning devices he was a match for the most wide-awake detective in the world.

The gang captured at the inn were tried and sentenced to prison, some of them having already served a term there; but no threats nor promise of reward could elicit from one of them information regarding their retreat.

“There is honor even among thieves.” These certainly showed their loyalty to their chief by stubbornly refusing to disclose his hiding place.



## CHAPTER VIII

### LESLIE'S WOOING

That summer passed in the Adirondacks was the happiest period of Leslie's life. The cottage near the pond, with its fair occupant, made for him an earthly paradise.

He had visited Mabel often and she had become very dear to him. She had been an apt scholar, too. Her sketches were well executed, and she had a taste for coloring that was marvelous. Leslie was proud of her success.

The day that he had set for his return home was drawing near.

"I must find out my fate to-day," he decided. "I believe Mabel returns my love; yet what if I have mistaken gratitude for the warmer sentiment. But no! it cannot be, she *must* love me. Life without her would not be worth living."

So once more he directed his steps toward the well known place. Fortune smiled on him. He found Mabel sitting on her favorite rock, sketch-book in hand, intent upon her task.

She was so occupied that Leslie nearly reached her before she saw him. A look of pleasure came into her eyes and she laughingly asked,



“Did you drop from the clouds?”

“No; but I shall be in a cloud if you are not glad to see me.”

Mabel blushed.

“I did not expect you so soon. It is not yet the hour of my lesson.”

Now, Leslie was a true American. There was an ordeal to be gone through, and the sooner over the better.

“It is another kind of a lesson I have come to talk about, one I have been learning this summer. Mabel, put away your sketch-book.”

She smiled and teasingly asked,

“Can you not speak while I hold it? Why must I lay it aside?”

“I cannot bear that you should jest with me now. Can you not guess what it is I wish to say? Mabel, I love you. Say that you will be my wife. Bid me hope. Let me hear you say that you love me.”

She lifted her shy, sweet face and whispered softly,

“Leslie, I love you, and will be your wife.”

So then both had learned “the old, old story”; and in the place which had been the scene of their first meeting, and where they had spent so many happy hours, they plighted their vows.

When Leslie would have gone to the house and asked her father for her hand, she gently begged him not.



"Let me tell him, myself. You do not know how fond he is of me. Poor, poor papa! How can I leave him? He has often said that he could not live without me."

"You need not part with your father. Your home shall be his home. Mabel, your father my father."

Mabel found her father pacing the floor of the library. She ran to him, twined her arms around his neck, and fondly kissed him. He returned the caress and said,

"How beautiful and happy you look to-day, my little girl."

"I am happy, papa, and — and I wish to tell you something."

"What is it, my dear? "

Her task was no easy one. Her color came and went, rose and lily succeeding each other. At last she asked shyly,

"Papa, do you like Leslie Lathrop? "

"What a question!" Then, all at once he caught the drift of it, and the smile died from his lips.

"Certainly, I like Mr. Lathrop," he answered dryly.

"I mean would you — would you like him well enough to live with him always?" stammered she. "He has told me he loves me, and wishes to make me his wife. He wanted to come and tell you; but, papa dear, I preferred telling you myself."



He hid the pain in his fatherly heart.

"How can I expect to keep you always? He may not prove so bad to live with, after all."

"Papa!" cried Mabel, as she noticed his poorly concealed agitation. "I told Leslie I ought not leave you, and he says his home shall be your home as well as mine."

"Do you love him?"

The crimson deepened on the girl's face as she replied.

"Better than my own life."

"Then I yield you to him. I think the young man is worthy of you. I knew his father, who was my college chum. A nobler man never existed. Mabel, one thing I must warn you against. Should you marry, never deceive your husband in the slightest thing. Keep no secrets, be they ever so small, from him; for they are worms that will gnaw and eat into the very vitals of your heart."

"Papa, I will try to be good and will always love you."



## CHAPTER IX

### BLANCHE HEARS OF THE ENGAGEMENT

The next day Leslie called on Mr. Lestrangle and asked his consent to his marriage with Mabel. After granting it Mr. Lestrangle said,

“It does not fall to the lot of every man to possess such a treasure as you will have in Mabel. Leslie Lathrop, I confide this jewel to your keeping. May Heaven deal with you as you deal with my child.”

Leslie was anxious for a speedy marriage, and it was arranged to have a quiet wedding to take place in three weeks. That night Leslie wrote to Blanche, telling her of his engagement to Mabel. This is part of the letter:

“Dear sister Blanche:

“Congratulate me, for I have found the ideal you spoke of. She is not the uncivilized dusky maiden you suggested. She — No, I will not undertake it. I cannot describe so much beauty and goodness. You can judge for yourself when you see her. Blanche, you cannot help loving her. You must for my sake. God only knows how truly and deeply I



love my Mabel,—that is her name. I want you to be a sister to her. I shall see you in a few days.

“Your brother, LESLIE.”

It was Blanche's habit to read all her letters in her room. It was well for her that this time there were no witnesses to her discomfiture. As she read, her face became livid — her lips twitched with the unspeakable pain at her heart, and her eyes had a look of utter despair. Her hands trembled so that she could scarcely hold the letter. When she had finished reading it, a sob of anguish burst from her.

“I cannot bear it!”

Once again she read the short note through.

“Alas! it is only too true!”

A fit of angry weeping succeeded despair. Gradually she became calmer, giving place to a hatred so deep, so wicked, so treacherous as to almost frighten her. She snatched the letter that had dropped from her hands, and tore it into bits, then cast them out of the window to the wind, saying,

“There! with his letter goes my love. Ha! ha! I, a sister to your Mabel. Leslie Lathrop, you are a fool to think it. As Heaven hears me, I will be avenged! He must have known that I loved him. Why was he so anxious I should give my lovers hope? It ought to have been a warning to me. But love is blind. The high bred young man could not bear to wed with a washerwoman's daughter. He must have known, despite all pains I took to



conceal it. I turned the poor old creature, my mother, upon the streets. All to win Leslie, and I have lost! But I will yet be even with him."

. . . . .

The wedding day soon came round. There were no bride's-maids, no invited guests, no merry-making. Mr. Lestrangle went with them to the quiet little church and gave the bride away, Mrs. Grant as witness.

"It is not the kind of a wedding I would like to give my child," said Mr. Lestrangle, as they sat down to the simple little meal on their return.

"I prefer it to a grand and tiresome one," Mabel smilingly answered.

"And I also," chimed in Leslie; "there will be time for gaieties when we reach New York. Blanche is determined to give us a grand reception. I warned her to ask but a few friends."

"Thank you, dear," said Mabel. She knew that he wished to spare her the trying ordeal of being presented to a house full of critical strangers. Mrs. Grant was to go with them in the capacity of maid to the young bride. Mr. Lestrangle had urged it, and Mabel preferred it to engaging a stranger.

When the hour of parting between father and daughter came, it was a sorrowful one. Mabel was troubled with a presentiment that she would never see him again.

"Be comforted, my child. Go, and enjoy your



trip and on your return from abroad, God willing, I will join you in your new home."

Tenderly he unclasped her clinging arms; gently he stroked her golden head and placed her in the carriage.

On their arrival in New York, to their surprise they found that Blanche had prepared a grand reception for them. This was her first attempt at retaliation. Leslie had told her of Mabel's solitary life, of her isolation from society, and she had chosen this method, thinking to wound Leslie's pride and crush the young bride by exposing her ignorance to the fashionable world. Great was her anger and disappointment when she saw how easily the young wife took her place among the guests, and moved about with stately grace. Blanche had hoped to show the company glaring defects in her rival. She had simply brought out fine points of the genuine lady.

"It will not be such an easy matter to crush her. With that lovely face and graceful manner she will have New York at her feet. But if I do not succeed in one way, I will another! I hate her all the more for her sweet face and winning ways!"

Blanche had been the first to congratulate Leslie and his bride, as they entered the house. On meeting Leslie's reproachful glance, she whispered softly,

"Forgive me, dear, but I wanted our friends to see your beautiful wife." Then slipping her arm



in Mabel's, she said, "Come, sister, I will show you to your room."

When the bridal couple descended to the drawing-room, with Blanche in close attendance, none seemed happier than she, as she stood near Mabel and witnessed with what perfect ease and grace she received the congratulations of the guests. It was then that Blanche inwardly cursed herself for having made such a stupid mistake. Mabel's beauty far eclipsed the handsome blonde. It was gall and wormwood to Blanche to witness Leslie's undisguised adoration.

"I will bide my time," she said under her breath.



## CHAPTER X

### THE SHARK SHOWS HIS TEETH

Happy in the love of her husband, and in the bright scenes which surrounded her; happy in the promise that her father would join her soon, Mabel forgot the shadow of evil that darkened the parting with her father. Mr. Lestrangle had not been able to cast out the foreboding, for he, too, had felt a strange presentiment of coming trouble. Doubly thick did the shadows gather about him on one lonely evening in November as he sat alone in his library. A letter from Mabel told of her happiness. It said: "Were you only with us, it would be complete. The only thing to mar it is the thought of how lonely you must be." (He was leading the life of a hermit.)

While thinking of Mabel and the past, a loud rap at the door broke in upon his meditations. He thrust the letter under the cushion of his chair, and fearless of danger, he hastened to the door. What was his astonishment as the light, falling upon the face of the visitor, revealed to him the well remembered features of John Drew, alias Sharky Dandy.

"Begone!" he ordered. "How dare you show



your face here? Go! lest I be tempted to kill you where you stand."

With a sneer of derision, Sharky retorted,

"Not quite so fast, my noble sir. You see I have the advantage of you," and he leveled a revolver at the other's head. "I knew you would show fight so came prepared. Old boy, if you value your life, throw up your hands and do as I bid you. March into your sitting-room. I have a bone to pick with you."

Seeing resistance was folly, yet fearless of what might follow, Mr. Lestrangle obeyed.

"Well, John Drew (alias Sharky Dandy), where is your bone? Pick it in haste, so rid me of your company."

"Shut your mouth and speak when you're spoken to. Where's the dog that married your girl, and what's his name?"

"That is not your business."

"Oh, ain't it?" shouted the other. "Well, then, I'll make it mine. I'm bound to find out, if I search the world over. Where are they?"

"I refuse to tell."

"No more fooling, old man! As you value your life answer."

"I refuse."

"Then d—n you! I will shoot you down."

Mr. Lestrangle rose, his form towering over that of his enemy. With outstretched hand he said,

"I fear not death, neither am I afraid of you. Thank Heaven! my child is beyond your reach."



With a cry of rage, Sharky once more raised his weapon.

“Die, fool!”

In the very act of murder a new idea occurred to him.

“No!” he said, “I will not fire. There is a better way of ridding the world of you. Down with you in that chair.”

He then securely tied Mr. Lestrangle’s hands and roughly jamming a hat on his head, bade him march out of the house. As they went forth, Sharky pointed out the direction he wished the other to take. On they walked in silence, till they reached the wood-cutter’s hut. The trap-door within was opened, and Sharky motioned Mr. Lestrangle to go forward. He saw it was Sharky’s purpose to imprison him in the cave. Instead of obeying, he faced Sharky, saying,

“Although I had made up my mind to obey your marching orders, I now ask you if you really intend driving me into that underground hole? If there is a spark of humanity or man about you, lay down that weapon, and then if by main strength you can force me into it, well and good. Give me a fair chance.”

A malicious leer spread over Sharky’s face. He knew full well that in a fair contest he was no match for the man before him.

“Do I mean to drive you down there? Yes, siree! Give you a fair chance! Not if I know myself! I am not a fool. No, my cunning fox, in



you go! My friend, here, never goes back on me," indicating the revolver. "Down with you through that opening mighty quick! or I will put a flea in your ear."

Mr. Lestrangle felt angry with himself for having expected mercy from the merciless, and slowly went down the passage. Here old Meg stood with a light and piloted the pair to a room at the end of it.

"Meg," said Sharky, "I have brought this gentleman to keep you company. No doubt you will fill the place in his heart made vacant by the loss of his pretty daughter." And he laughed, a mean, tantalizing laugh. Lestrangle maintained silence.

"Meg! fetch the key!" said Sharky.

She fumbled in her dirty dress-pocket and brought out a bunch of keys.

"Now," said he, "go and unlock that door!"

As soon as it was opened, he motioned to Mr. Lestrangle to enter the dark apartment, keeping close at his heels. There were several doors here, all opening into other rooms. This was one of the caves to be found among the mountains, which the gang of robbers had discovered and utilized to hide stolen treasures and conceal themselves whenever the officers of the law were in hot pursuit.

Having unlocked one of the doors, Meg swung it back, and again Mr. Lestrangle was forced forward. When they were within this, Sharky called,

"Meg! let down the ladder!"



Meg went towards the center of the apartment, lifted a trap-door, and through this aperture she let down a slender ladder some twelve feet long.

"There! go down," said Sharky.

Caring very little now what should become of him, Lestrangle descended. Scarcely had his feet left the last round, when Sharky jerked the ladder up, and peering down into the hole, called out in a taunting voice,

"Well, my haughty friend, when you are disposed to answer my questions, I may let you see the light of day. Send me word by Meg."

"Never!" shouted Lestrangle from his stone dungeon. "Leave me! Why did you not shoot me rather than force me into this living tomb? But remember there will be a day of reckoning for you."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Sharky. "*Your* day of reckoning has already come. Now, old mule, listen to me; I hope soon to bring your spy of a son-in-law here, too, and then I'll have his pretty wife for a housekeeper. I will send your breakfast of hot rolls and steaming coffee by Meg, whose acquaintance you will have a chance to cultivate. Bye, bye."

Having added these last bitter drops to Lestrangle's cup of misery, Sharky banged the trap door down, leaving him in darkness. He heard the closing of the heavy door and the turning of the key in the lock. After that all was silence. To one less strong and resigned the ill-fortune that



had befallen might have dethroned reason, but Lestrangle bore the outrage with a calmness at which he himself was astonished. He proceeded to investigate his quarters, groping his way around the room, and carefully feeling the walls as he went. His hands came in contact with nothing but the cold solid rock. Weary of his fruitless search he abandoned it.

“With five or six feet of space above my head, and this thick wall of natural masonry around me, there is no hope of escape from this horrible place. God pity me, and preserve my child!”



## CHAPTER XI

### MABEL'S ANXIETY

"Leslie," said Mabel one evening as the two sat in their rooms in the great hotel in Paris, where they were stopping, "what do you suppose is the reason we have not received any letters from papa? It is over three months since we have heard from him. Something has happened or else he is ill."

"Probably his letters have miscarried. Do not alarm yourself, my darling. If your father were ill, we certainly should have heard of it."

"Do not think me foolish, Leslie, but of late, even when I am in the gayest of gay spirits, the feeling that assailed me when I bid papa good-bye comes over me. Sometimes I think it was not right that I left him."

"Do not let such thoughts trouble you. It is borrowing trouble without reason. Let me see you smile again, my darling. We will go out for a walk to rid us of the blues."

"Leslie, one question more before we go. Please do not laugh, but tell me frankly. Do you think my undisguised love for you is ridiculed by the fashionable people here? I have noticed it is a common custom for husband and wife to almost



ignore each other. While the wife smiles upon and holds court to half a dozen admirers, the husband dances attendance on other fair ladies."

For answer, Leslie took the exquisite face between the palms of his hands, tenderness beaming from his eyes as he replied,

"Why need you care what people think? Not for a thousand worlds would I have you like these shallow ones, or other than you are, my pearl among women."

The passionate tones of his voice thrilled her with joy unspeakable, and she nestled closer to his heart.

"I had almost forgotten to tell you. I am going driving with Mrs. Bentley to-morrow. You will not mind a little time given to her? I like her. She is so noble and so sad I am drawn to her."

"Go by all means," answered Leslie.

Strange to say the woman about whom they were talking was at that very moment thinking of them. Mrs. Bentley was the same person of whom Blanche had written a glowing account to Leslie during her visit at Newport. All the grace of womanhood was centered in her person. Her gentle, affable manners, keen intellect and wondrous tact, won women's hearts, while her reserved ways with men kept them at a distance even while they admired.

"How like my own daughter Mrs. Lathrop seems! Just the same age she would be now, and



bears her name, Mabel! How my heart thrills over it! Can it be possible? Ah no! I must not cherish the wild hope. What would I not give to once more clasp in my arms my long lost child, so cruelly torn from me. To-morrow I must find out what her name was before her marriage. How she loves that husband of hers! And he appears to return affection. But — bah! — All men are alike, unreasonable, selfish, cruel.”



## CHAPTER XII

### MRS. BENTLEY'S DOUBTS CONFIRMED

The next morning, Mabel heard a gentle rap on her door, and made haste to admit the visitor.

"Oh, it is Mrs. Bentley. I am so glad. Come in, please."

"Yes, my dear, I saw your husband go out and thought to have a dear little visit with you before taking our promised drive."

"How kind of you," said Mabel.

Mrs. Bentley's eyes were more wistful than ever, as she scanned Mabel's features. The mother instinct was strong, and she longed to clasp Mabel to her heart as her very own. Even were she sure of it, she could not claim her child. Were she to tell Mabel all her tale, it would be incredible, evidence was so much against her. However, she determined to know the truth.

"Leslie has gone to the post-office," said Mabel. "I am getting uneasy about papa, not having received any word from him lately. Leslie has gone to see if the letter did not get misplaced somewhere."

Here was an opportunity for Mrs. Bentley to learn what she wished to know.



“I hope nothing serious has happened to your father, you are so much attached to him. I fancy you must be his favorite child.”

“I am his favorite, for he has only me.”

“Ah! that is the reason you speak of him only. How long since your mother died?” asked Mrs. Bentley in tremulous tones.

“How long? I do not know, I have not the faintest recollection of her. My father never speaks of her. Whenever I have asked him about her, he has been so pained and sorrowful that it frightened me into silence. How strong and deep must have been his love for her, whose loss has caused him to isolate himself from all the world! Sometimes I think that trouble other than loss of my mother has brought on the great sorrow which years have failed to lessen. He has lost confidence in humanity, but in — pardon me, I ought not afflict your ears with private affairs.”

“Please go on, I wish to hear, dear child, so as to be able to sympathize with you. I, too, have suffered.”

For the first time Mabel noticed the awful pallor of her companion, and asked in an alarmed voice,

“Are you ill?”

“It is only a pain here,” placing her hand on her heart. “It will soon pass. I have stayed too much indoors of late. You were saying your father has lost confidence in all —”

“In all except Leslie and me.”

Mrs. Bentley swallowed a big lump in her throat.



“He still holds me in abhorrence,” she said to herself. “Mrs. Lathrop,” she asked, “do you mind telling me his name?”

“Henry Lestrangé.”

Though she expected the answer, she had miscalculated her strength. A deathly faintness overcame her; but she did not lose consciousness. Mabel sprang to her aid and was about to call Mrs. Grant.

“Stay! I will be better in a moment,” she whispered.

Not knowing what to do and full of loving sympathy, Mabel clasped Mrs. Bentley’s neck, and kissed her fondly.

“You were not feeling well, and I tired you with depressing tattle.”

“Your caresses are so tender, I am quite well again,—see,” and she drew Mabel’s golden head to her bosom.

“Let me call you Mabel, a name very dear to me. What you have told me is strangely like my own sorrow, and it could not fail to affect me. Forget my agitation.”

Owing to Mrs. Bentley’s sudden indisposition the drive was postponed. She retired to her room, fearing to betray her secret if she remained longer with her child.

“What have I done,” she cried, “that I must suffer this cruel wrong? All the long years have not softened his heart towards me. He still believes me guilty, else why has he never breathed my



name to our child? It was not enough to cast me out of his life; but I must also be deprived of her companionship. I will never forgive him!! I humbled myself once to him; but he cruelly repulsed me. Never again will I try to justify myself. If I might but claim Mabel as my child, I would be satisfied."

When Nannette, her maid, came in to help her dress for dinner, Mrs. Bentley did not notice her entrance.

"I came to assist you in dressing for the evening."

"I had forgotten about it, Nanette. I suppose it must be," and she gave herself, with a sigh, into her hands.

That night she was seemingly as graceful and self-possessed as ever. None guessed the anguish gnawing at her heart, the demands of mother-love that racked it.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RETURN

Mabel became so worried and uneasy because no letter came from her father, that Leslie determined to cut short their European trip. He was becoming worried too. When he told Mabel of his resolution, she beamed upon him in grateful happiness.

“How I thank you for always anticipating my wishes.”

Just then a letter was brought Mr. Lathrop. It was an answer from the postmaster of H. Station, in the Adirondacks — a reply to Leslie’s enquiry about Mabel’s father. The man wrote that he had neither seen nor heard anything of Mr. Lestranger for over two months, and supposed he had left his mountain home.

Leslie could not conceal the news from Mabel, and there was a world of entreaty in her eyes as she said imploringly:

“O Leslie! Let us go at once. Something is surely wrong.”

“It shall be as you wish, my Mabel.”

Their berths were soon engaged on a steamer homeward bound. Mabel’s sole regret was the



parting with Mrs. Bentley whom she loved with a fond affection.

"If my mother had lived and been like her," she thought.

To Mrs. Bentley the separation was painful. She had found her child and now must lose her again. Ah! life for her was still a hard school, an ordeal.

. . . . .

The voyage across the Atlantic was a long week to Mabel, filled with apprehension for her father. She and Leslie would only stay in New York for a brief rest, before going on to his home in the mountains. Even this delay they were sorry for. Blanche welcomed them back with apparent delight, but hatred and jealousy blazed anew in her heart at sight of Leslie's devotion to his wife.

Mrs. Bentley had written a letter that she entrusted to Mabel's care, who could not find it when she came to look for it. She supposed it safe in her cloak pocket, but it was not there. Mrs. Grant helped her look through traveling bags and trunks, without avail.

"How could I be so careless!" Mabel exclaimed.  
 "I must write Mrs. Bentley about it."

That evening, Leslie went to consult his lawyer. Mabel found the time long and said to Blanche,

"I wonder what keeps Leslie?"

A mocking smile suggestive of unknown ills gleamed on Blanche's face.

"You will get accustomed to Leslie's peculiari-



ties. How implicitly you trust him. I hope your faith in him may never be shaken."

"Stab number one," she said to herself, as she bade the young wife good-night. "Leslie wants me to watch over his darling, and I will, to his sorrow and her undoing."

Just as they were ready to start for the Adirondacks, Leslie received a note from his lawyer, demanding his immediate presence to consult on a matter of importance, involving large property interests.

"How exasperating!" he said, "and we so anxious to go."

"No knowing how long they will keep you. It is hard to wait when papa may be in trouble. O Leslie," she said, "why not let me go on alone? You can come as soon as your business is done." And thus it was arranged; for it was but a little journey and he would soon be free to follow.

It was a beautiful day and Mabel enjoyed the ride. How surprised and happy her father would be to see her! Then a nameless dread seized her, lest she should not find him. When she arrived at H. Station, she got a conveyance to take her to her father's house. On her way she passed Spinks' hotel. There were several men standing on the veranda who wondered who the fair lady in the carriage could be,—all but one who stood apart from the rest.

"By jove!" he ejaculated under his breath, "it is she." In another instant he was gone.



When Mabel got within a few rods of her former home, she told the driver to let her out, for she wished to surprise her father.

"Wait for me! If I am not back in a quarter of an hour, you need not stay longer."

Meantime, Sharky Dandy, for he it was, lost no time. He took a short cut to the Lestrangle house, went in and locked all the doors, except the front one, which he purposely left open, then took his station behind it, as Mabel ascended the steps.

"Dear papa is at home," she thought. "I am so glad. I'll not ring; but go in as if I had never been away." She went quickly, all tremulous with joy, and was tip-toeing her way to the sitting-room when out stepped Sharky from his hiding-place. He closed the door after her, locked it, and put the key in his pocket, then confronted Mabel. He was the first to speak.

"Ah! the pretty dove is captured at last. Nothing could be finer. It is capital! Couldn't understand why search wasn't made for that old flint-stone father of yours; but I never dreamed that old Nick would oblige me in this way. Sit down, my pretty! Don't make such eyes at me, or you'll scare a fellow!"

The shock of the surprise dazed Mabel; but she was brave.

"How dare you?" she cried. "Open that door and let me pass out!"

"Now, my dear, don't be in a hurry! Didn't you come here expecting to see your father?"



Why don't you ask me where he is? Perhaps I can tell you."

"Open that door and let me out,— or I will call for help!"

"Call for help?" laughed Sharky. "Of whom? As you are inclined to be a little mutinous, let me tell you at once that you are in my power, and will remain so until I see fit to release you! Where is your precious husband? I want him as company for your father,— the old man is getting homesick."

Mabel saw there was nothing to be gained by appealing to his mercy. She was in his power, and the thought made her reel. She would have fallen, had not Sharky caught her in his arms. Taking advantage of her weakness, he saturated his handkerchief with chloroform and held it to her nostrils. Satisfied now, that she would not waken for some time, he hastened out to the cabman, telling him that the lady had sent him to say she would not go back that night.

With what speed he could, he conveyed her to the cave, repeating the chloroform treatment as needed to maintain quiet. Mabel had not been in the cave long before she revived. She looked wonderingly at old Meg. Gradually her mind cleared up.

"Where am I? This is not my father's house." The old hag grinned hideously and answered,

"This is my master's house. He brought you here, and will explain when he comes in."



The horror of Mabel's situation was maddening; but nature came to her relief and she gave way to uncontrollable weeping. She appealed to Meg,—she begged her to release her; but the old creature was as obdurate as a rock. When Sharky returned, Mabel was still weeping bitterly.

“Well, my lady, what is the use of taking on? No one is going to eat you up. If you are a good girl and will stop that sniveling, I'll let you stay with us; but I'll be hanged if I do, if you are going to act like a baby. I want you to help Meg cook for your husband when he comes. Wouldn't he be mad, if he knew of our elopement? I must have him for a lodger, so I can pay him what I owe him. He will be prowling around before long, looking for you. That will be my chance to nab him. I shall watch for him, you may be sure. Meg will see to you.”

Mabel kept silent. Sharky soon went out again, followed by Meg. A deathly sensation again seized the captive, as she heard the key turn in the lock.

“O Leslie! if you but knew what has befallen me.”

Old Meg presently brought a tray containing food, placing it on a small table.

“Eat when you like, I will not bother you again to-night.”

Mabel, knowing she must keep up strength, ate the food prepared, then took up the lamp and began examining her room. She hoped against hope



to find a way of escape. She had gone nearly around the walls, and was about to give up the search, when her hand came in contact with a slight depression near the floor. She also discovered a crack just where the depression was. It ran along an irregular shaped rock, of a different color from the rest of the wall. It looked very much as if it had been fitted in. Mabel put down her lamp and tried to push the block of stone; but her efforts were useless. Then she tried to study out some method by which the obstacle could be removed. She had seen men move heavy bodies with comparative ease by means of levers. She searched the room for something she could use in that way. At last she took a slat from the bedstead, and tried to use it as a lever. It was too blunt to insert in the crevice. She determined not to abandon her efforts. With the table-knife brought for her use by old Meg, she succeeded in thinning it sufficiently for her purpose. She found she could move the block a trifle. For hours she pried and pushed on the stone. At length her efforts were crowned with success. When a little more than half way out, it tumbled, leaving an aperture sufficiently large for her to pass through. A current of air rushed in from the other side. Mabel looked at her watch. It was after twelve. Her delicate hands were blistered and she was weary; but she took the lamp and crawled through to investigate. The passage she entered was long and high and about three feet wide. Half way



up it, she perceived a faint streak of light coming from above. This was caused by a small opening, which admitted the rays of the moon, and also afforded air and ventilation for the cave.

"No escape here," she sighed. She walked noiselessly to the end of the corridor and she found three doors. The first she tried, but it was fastened; the next was the same; but the third was open. She went in, closing it carefully after her. A ladder stood up against the wall and near by was a dark hole. Peering down into it, she thought she heard a groan. Holding her light over it, she scanned it nervously. The groan was repeated. Brave though she was, the sound caused her flesh to creep.

"What fresh horror here? No doubt the cry comes from some victim who, like myself, has been shut up in this miserable dungeon. Why should I fear? I can meet with no one worse than my tormentor." She dragged the ladder to the aperture and let it down in place. Holding her lamp in one hand, with the other she clung to the rounds. She reached the bottom in safety, but in terror at what she might discover. In one corner was a bed, and upon it lay a man. The truth flashed upon her mind. Sharky's allusion to her father gave light to her understanding. She ran to the still form on the bed. A cry of joy burst from her lips.

"O papa! papa! I have found you! Speak to me! oh, do speak to your Mabel!"



The familiar tones of his child's voice reached his consciousness, and he slowly opened his eyes. With a yearning cry of content, he folded her in his arms and wept like a child.

"Mabel, Mabel, tell me I am not dreaming — it is your real self, come back to me." And he held her to his heart, patting and caressing her golden head. Then his face grew dark and troubled.

"I fear for you now you are here. How came you to this cave?"

Mabel told him of her late misfortune; but seeing how the recital of her wrongs affected him, she said,

"Do not despair, dear papa; I think we can escape. Now that I have found you I feel brave. We can work together. But how you have suffered!" she added, looking into his haggard and worn face.

"Suffered! I cannot begin to tell you how much." Mabel shuddered.

"Papa, forget the past, and help me to plan how to escape. Our keeper, the old woman, will be alone to-morrow. Come up to my prison room and see what we can do."

It was nearly morning before they hit upon a plan they thought might work.

When Meg brought Mabel's breakfast, to find out if the coast was clear, she said in a conciliatory tone,

"I wish you would ask your master to come here. I want to speak with him."



“ My master’s gone. Didn’t he tell you yesterday he was agoin’? ”

Scarcely had the words left Meg’s lips, ere Mr. Lestrangle leaped from his hiding place. In one bound he was by her side and grasping her wrists. Though taken by surprise, she struggled and fought like a wild-cat. It is doubtful if Mr. Lestrangle in his weak condition could have managed her without Mabel’s assistance. At last she was securely bound and locked in. They made haste to be away, not stopping for food, even though they needed this refreshment.

We will not undertake to describe their painful tramp. Owing to Mr. Lestrangle’s perfect knowledge of the mountains, they reached H. Station in safety. A telegram was sent to Leslie to come at once. The first train brought him. When he heard what had happened to Mr. Lestrangle and Mabel, he vowed he would not rest until he found the outlaw, and brought him to punishment. Leslie was anxious to get Mabel and her father home, as both were suffering from their rough experience, especially Mr. Lestrangle.

Meanwhile, Sharky remained away all day. Imagine his anger and chagrin, when upon his return to the cave he found Meg securely bound and the prisoners escaped. He raged like a madman. He cursed old Meg, himself, and his bad luck. He knew the game was up. Mr. Lestrangle free, the cave was no longer a safe retreat. After



setting Meg at liberty, he gave her a sum of money to take her to her old home. Leaving the robbers' den, he set fire to the hut above it and disappeared.



## CHAPTER XIV

### SAM PARDY

Nearly two months had elapsed since Mabel's escape from the cave. Diligent search had been kept up for Sharky, the mountains were scoured, the cave explored. A notice, with a minute description of the outlaw, was placed in all the leading newspapers, offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for his capture, alive or dead. Soon after the papers were alive with news of a great feat performed by a cowboy, on the Western plains who had been attacked by the notorious Sharky Dandy, and had shot him. A telegram was received at police headquarters in New York, stating that the cowboy in question was already on his way there, with his prize. It ran thus,

“ I'm bringin' the blamed tenderfoot for you to put underground. Have ready the price of his scalp.

“ SAM PARDY,

“ Silver Hollow,

“ New Mexico.”

A posse of police officers met the cowboy at the train, and took the corpse to headquarters, where



it was identified as that of Sharky Dandy. When questioned about the man who had eluded and defied the law so long, the cowboy, tilting back his slouch hat and planting his big boots firmly on the floor, said,

“I reckon the blamed critter thought himself so smart that he'd never find his match. I wuz ridin' back to my shanty from Silver Hollow whar I'd ben playin' a few games, and won quite a pot; when ther galloot overtook me and shouted, 'Hands up! or I'll shoot!' I knowed at once he wuz green; for we uns don't go about without a barker. Catch us sayin' 'Look out, I'm goin' to shoot!' We shoot first. When I did hold up my hands, tenderfoot fell down. I jumped from my broncho to find out how much he wuz damaged. Wasn't I beat when I see thet he wuz the same durned varmint wat ud ben watching me win the boodle. I stooped down to take a second look to make sure it wuz him; when the feller opened his eyes.

“‘I'm dun for. It's all up with me; but I owe you no grudge — You're a man! — I'm Sharky Dandy on whose head is set a prize of ten thousand dollars. You're in luck —' He pulled off a diamond ring and said, 'Keep this as a memory stone, to mark your day's work.' This ware his last words, and had been spoken between grasps for breath. In a few minutes more, he had gone over the divide.

“I took my prize to Silver Hollow whar an in-



quest wuz held. This bit of paper wuz found on him."

Handing a letter to the chief, together with the valuable ring, he asked,

"What do you think of this?"

A picture of a shark, with the words, "To our leader S. D.," were neatly engraved on the inside of the ornament. The note read as follows:

"Dear friend:

"I have reached the land of dirty miners and greasy cowboys. New York was getting too hot for me. Now that my mountain retreat will no longer be safe, I think I will try this place a while. But I'm not in love with it, you bet. When you see a chance to make a good haul let me know, and I will run down and give you a lift. I am going"—

Evidently, Sharky had been interrupted, for the sentence was not finished; but enough had been written to show it had been intended for a confederate.

"You are a lucky fellow!" said the chief of police, "and have rid the world of a nuisance. You have earned the reward."

In due time it was handed to him, and he departed in great glee.



## CHAPTER XV

### A FIENDISH PLOT

Mr. Lestrangle now made his home with Leslie and Mabel, and had taken on a new lease of life. So much happiness that was not her own in sight did not tend to soften Blanche's feelings for her hated rival. In a thousand ways she tried to estrange the loving couple. Time rolled on, but it wrought no change in her heart.

One summer evening, when Leslie and Mabel were strolling in the garden, Blanche watched them from her room, furious that all her plans had thus far failed. Mabel was telling Leslie of the strange disappearance of Mrs. Bentley's letter.

"I wonder why she has not answered my letter," she said. "Perhaps she is angry with me for losing hers. It grieves me, for I love her so dearly."

"How I hate Mabel!" was Blanche's mental ejaculation. "She has stolen the place in Leslie's heart which ought to have been mine." She clenched her hands as she repeated the words, this time aloud,

"How I hate her! I wish she were dead!"

"What is the matter with deary now?" asked a voice from behind her.



Blanche turned sharply around.

“You here, Madgee? How long have you been watching me?”

“Much long, deary. But must not be mad, cause Madgee hear. Me know always, my deary not like new mistress. You not wish her live? Madgee not wish it, too. Me not like lady my mistress hate,” muttered Madgee. Her face was as inscrutable as a dummy’s. “Deary, speak word and Madgee help.”

“I hate her, Madgee. I wish she had never seen Leslie.”

“Deary, be still — not trouble heart. Madgee take care — pretty wife not be in home long.”

Blanche was half frightened over the evil her words invoked. Thoughts of murder were in the Hindoo woman’s mind. She was about to caution Madgee against any act of violence when another sight of the happy pair stayed her words.

“I do not care what becomes of Mabel; she is in my way.”

“Don’t ee care. Madgee make all right. Me go now,” and the human serpent silently glided out of the room.

Madgee had been taken into Mrs. Lathrop’s service, when the latter’s little girl was a baby. She had come across the Hindoo woman when traveling in England. Mrs. Lathrop fancied that the foreign woman would make a very faithful attendant and nurse for her little daughter. Madgee had indeed been faithful, but her notions of right



and wrong were hazy. After the death of little Blanche Lathrop, the Hindoo woman's care and love were bestowed on the adopted daughter, and she clung to her young mistress with the dogged pertinacity of her race. In her own country she had acquired a knowledge of queer practice of potent drugs. She already had a scheme that would defy detection. She awaited the time to put it in execution. The next day, she went forth to do work preparatory to its inception. Her queer, sinewy figure slid along the streets with the undulating movements of a serpent. Her turbaned head was wrapped in a thick, dark veil which hid her repellent features. After going some distance she hailed a cab and directed the driver to take her to R. Street. Here she alighted, paid her fare and went on at a rapid gait. She next took a street car, riding a long way. When she got off, she turned into a street not famous for respectability. From the rickety buildings issued forth noisy, dirty children; garrulous women and tipsy men were gathered in groups; but Madgee heeded them not. She glided on, never pausing until she reached the door of Dr. Tungee's office. He was an old Hindoo, well known to her, and she had great faith in his skill. They exchanged a few words in Hindoostanee, then the mummified old doctor conducted his visitor to a little room at the back of his office, where they talked in low tones. When they came forth, Tungee went to the shelves filled with strange jars, but did not find the concoction



he sought. Then he opened a secret drawer in the wall and drew from it two bottles of colorless fluid. He filled a small phial with equal quantities from each. From a packet he took a white powder, wrapping it in a bit of paper. He told Madgee to drop this in the last dose given to the patient from the phial.

“When the bottle is emptied, the work will be done,” and there was a curious glitter in his eyes. She seized the drugs eagerly and placed them in the bosom of her dress. Taking out her purse, she drew out a bank-note which made the crafty Hindoo’s eyes dilate with greed. He stretched out his hand to take the offered money, then suddenly changed his mind. His head was bent and Madgee could not see the crafty look on his swarthy features.

“Keep your money. All I ask of you is this: When the medicine is used up, come and tell me. I want to see for myself how it has worked.”

Madgee thanked him for his gift and promised to do what he asked. Tungee told her how to administer the drug and she departed in high spirits. Her fellow countryman, following her with his beady eyes, soliloquized in an undertone.

“She is a sharp one. I’ll keep an eye on her. I will find out for whom she is getting the drug. If she gets paid for the job; she must share with me.”



## CHAPTER XVI

### LIFE AND DEATH

A great joy came to Leslie and Mabel; the birth of a daughter. Mrs. Grant was chief nurse, and mother and child were doing finely under her vigilant care. Blanche in Leslie's presence had been kind to Mabel. She was devotion itself to the invalid, and Leslie's heart was full of gratitude for her watchful interest. In reality it was the interest of a creature over coveted prey. Another as keen and as subtle was watching the young mother. Blanche might deceive Leslie, but not the Hindoo woman. Neither did she attempt to hide her feelings from Madgee.

A week later, Blanche, being in one of her distressful moods brought on by jealousy, talked aloud in her bitterness of soul.

"Why was it I could not win Leslie's heart?"

"And ee may yet, deary," whispered Madgee behind her.

Blanche jumped as if an angel from the pit of darkness had interpreted her unspoken wish.

"How is it, that I cannot be a moment alone but you pounce upon me unawares."

"Don't be angree, deary — me do it for you —



me know you feel bad — me hear ee — Have wish yet. Don't ee trouble. Me make all right — me watch sick wife to-night, deary."

With cat-like tread Madgee glided into the invalid's room. Mrs. Grant was caring for the infant. Madgee said,

"Go take nap. My mistree say me help you,— so go away."

Mrs. Grant had no liking for the Hindoo, but held it to be her duty to obey reasonable orders of the acting mistress of the household.

"I wonder how they can tolerate that old heathen," she thought as she went reluctantly from Mabel's bedside.

"Old woman not likee me," said Madgee to herself. "She same as old dog. Not like old cat."

That night the fatal undertaking was begun. Noiselessly she went to the table where the medicine was. Taking a glass, she poured into it a few drops from the phial the Hindoo doctor had given her, then filled it with beef-tea. When Mabel awoke, Madgee came to her bedside with the nourishment. Being thirsty, she drank it all. Soon she was under the influence of its potent spell. A sense of rest and pleasure stole over her, and soon she was sleeping.

Next day the physician found his patient a little feverish, and her pulse not quite as strong.

Madgee gave her service a part of every day or night, administering the secret potion to Mabel unknown to any one except Blanche. The only



difference she made was to increase the quantity of the drug.

Mabel's increasing weakness and languor puzzled the physician. Leslie, in alarm at her state, called in another doctor, but he was no wiser than the first. In all the years of their practice, they had never seen a case like it. There was no pain, only the young wife was growing so weak she could scarcely speak aloud. At times Blanche's conscience smote her, and she was half inclined to stop Madgee, but her jealous hatred and envy got the upperhand and her better angel hid her face and wept.

. . . . .

It was now nearly three weeks since Mabel's strength had been steadily failing. All the tonics prescribed by her physicians proved so many failures. They were becoming hopeless of her recovery. Mabel, too, believed the end of her earthly life close at hand.

One day when Mrs. Grant was overhauling her mistress' wardrobe, examining one garment after another, and on the lookout for moths, she came across her traveling cloak. The garment brought remembrance of the lost letter.

"Mrs. Lathrop said she put it in this cloak pocket," she soliloquized. "She must have been mistaken," thrusting her hand into it as she supposed. To her surprise, her hand went through between the linings of the cloak. At the bottom securely lay the lost letter.



“Good gracious!” she exclaimed. Knowing how pleased Mabel would be, she marched off to her mistress’ chamber.

“See what I’ve found!” holding up the letter.

“Bring it here, please, Mrs. Grant,” said Mabel in a faint voice. She reached for the letter, but was too weak to read it, so she handed it to Leslie. Mrs. Grant went back to her work, little thinking of what import it was.

Leslie opened the envelope and drew from it another sealed letter; also the note addressed to Mabel. He could hardly credit his senses as he read the address. “Mr. Henry Lestrangle.” He then opened the note to Mabel, glancing it over. Here was a strange revelation. He was in doubt as to whether Mabel, in her present weak state, ought to be told the startling facts disclosed in the letter, but seeing the anxious, inquiring look in her eyes, he concluded it wisest she should know.

“Mabel, my darling, do you feel strong enough to bear a glad surprise?”

“Yes, dear, I can bear even bad news better than suspense.”

But still he hesitated.

“Do you remember,” he asked, “of my once alluding to the strong resemblance between Mrs. Bentley and yourself? There is reason enough for the likeness. Who do you suppose she is? What relationship do you think she holds to you?”

Mabel became excited on hearing this.

“I remember,” she replied. “I have often



fancied that had my mother lived, she would be much like Mrs. Bentley. Tell me. I must know at once what you mean."

"Well, then, listen to what Mrs. Bentley wrote to you."

"My dear Child:

"I told you when you should read this note you would no longer wonder at my request that you take charge of the inclosed letter.

"When I first met you, I was irresistibly drawn to you by that instinct so strong in a mother's heart. As I became better acquainted, my suspicions were confirmed. When you told me about your dead mother, of your father and yourself, they became a certainty.

"Can I call it a blessing that the truth was made known to me? How can the same thing be at once a blessing and a curse? Yet, my darling child, it is so — a blessing because I have found in you a daughter in whom any mother's heart ought to rejoice. Alas! also a curse,—because, for some reason which, Heaven knows, my husband, your father, has placed a barrier between us which he alone can remove,—a curse, because in my longing to clasp you to my heart and call you my own, the dark shadow of doubt stands between us,—a curse that, though innocent as I am of all blame, appearances are so much against me that to try to exonerate myself from blame is all but impossible. I feel confident that you will know what I tell you is true and will feel for me and pity me. When I appealed to your father to let me explain, he so cruelly repulsed me, I made up my mind never to offer another explanation, but for your sake



I will do what I would not for my own. I would implore him on my knees, suffer humiliation,—nay, —were it necessary, walk through fire, to bring about a reconciliation that would restore to me my child. Plead my cause, Mabel. He cannot refuse you. In my letter to him I have made all necessary explanations concerning that terrible mistake that has blighted my life. Goodbye, my darling. I am not altogether hopeless, for I feel we shall meet again.

“ ‘ Your loving mother,

“ ‘ MABEL LESTRANGE.

“ ‘ P. S. Should I not hear from you after a reasonable length of time, I shall take it for granted you have disbelieved my assertion. I beg you to spare me the anguish such knowledge would bring. M. L.’ ”

Leslie did not read postscript to Mabel, fearing its effect.

“ O Leslie. I am dreaming a happy dream, am I? It must be true,” she went on in an excited tone. “ How could I have been so stupid as not to have known it before? But then, I always believed mother died when I was a little child. It must have been a terrible misunderstanding that separated my noble father and mother. He must have been hasty in his judgment, for I feel sure my mother was innocent. O Leslie! how vividly it all comes back to me, that scene in the Paris hotel when I told her about papa. How every word I said must have pierced her heart! Oh, we



must find her. Promise me, Leslie, that you will do so at once."

She cried and laughed alternately. Leslie knew so much excitement must be injurious, and he hastened to say,

"I will do my best to find your mother. Meanwhile, my darling, you must promise to be very reasonable and calm. Try and sleep. I will go and write to friends in Paris, and make inquiries about your mother. This letter addressed to your father, you, no doubt, would like to give to him yourself?"

"Oh, yes. I know him best, and I must plead my mother's cause."

Mabel was in haste to break the news to her father, and after her nap sent for him to come to her room. Mr. Lestrangle's face was pale with emotion as he listened to Mabel's appeal for her mother. Handing him his letter, she said,

"Papa, promise me you will seek a reconciliation at once."

"Rest in peace, my child. With all my heart, I promise; for that is my one great desire. There have been passages in my life, that none but the eye of God has seen,— this was one of them —"

Unable to control his feelings longer, he pressed his lips to Mabel's forehead and passed out of the room.



## CHAPTER XVII

### A TERRIBLE BLOW

"Mrs. Grant, I wish you would see if Leslie is in his study, and if he is not busy, tell him to come to me."

Leslie came hastily to his wife's bedside.

"Leslie," began Mabel, clasping his hand in both her own wasted ones, "how long is it since we found that letter? I cannot remember, for memory is failing as well as strength. Have you heard anything yet?"

"No, darling. It is only three days since we found the letter."

"Only three days! and I thought it was so long." Then her large, dark eyes looked wistfully into his and she said, "One more question. Tell me and do not deceive me, dear. Do you think I shall get well? As much as I would like to stay with you and baby, dear husband, I fear I am going to die. I shall not live to meet my mother again."

Leslie's face was scarcely less pallid than that of his wife's. Choking down his emotion he answered,



“Do not be discouraged, dearest; you worry too much.”

“No, Leslie, I do not worry. It is this strange apathy, this awful weakness, that makes me know that the time of parting is close at hand. How I wish I could shake off this languor! You want to call baby, Mabel,” she went on; “but there seems to be a fatality about the name. If you do not mind, I would like to call her Pansy. Her eyes are just like beautiful violets. She will be your little comforter, and papa’s also. You must love and cherish him, for he will be hardly less lonely than you, my husband.”

Heartbroken, Leslie listened to her gentle tones.

“One thing more I would like to say,” she continued; “I used to fancy Blanche did not like me. Sometimes I even thought her manner and speech cruel; but her kindness to me during my illness has put these thoughts far away. You are young, Leslie.” And the poor, thin face became pinched with the pain the words caused her. “It will be better for our little daughter’s sake that you should marry again. I know of none more worthy of you than Blanche. You have known each other always. And Leslie, though, even at the point of death, I am selfish enough to hope I shall always have the first place in your heart, I know that Blanche loved you before you knew me. I think she has felt that I usurped her place. After all, it is as well that I go away.”

“O Mabel, Mabel!” cried Leslie in agony, “do



not talk of dying. Do not talk of Blanche in that way. She is my sister,— that and nothing more.”

So absorbed were they in their conversation that they did not notice Blanche, who now came to the bedside, calm, pleasant, and seemingly unconcerned.

“She did not hear,” thought they, with mutual glances of satisfaction.

“The idiots,” commented Blanche to herself. “Do they think me silly enough to let them see that I listened? She has been sounding him, because she is afraid she is going to die, and that he will marry again. And he, man-fashion, has been swearing that no other woman shall ever take her place. We shall see.”

“How do you feel now?” she asked of Mabel, in soft tones of sympathy.

“No better, Blanche. I am *so* tired.”

“Now, Leslie, you deserve a sound scolding for making her talk so much. Go downstairs and let her rest.”

“You are right, Blanche. It was very selfish in me.” Then, stooping, he kissed Mabel and whispered, “Rest, my darling, and I will come back soon.”

Blanche had come into the room just in time to hear Leslie’s last words, and had jumped at a wrong conclusion — a habit with evil disposed persons.

In the evening, when Leslie came back to Mabel, Blanche was already there, and purposely out-



stayed him, busying herself with offices of apparent kindness. She was determined not to let them speak together alone any more. When she retired to her room, she found old Madgee awaiting her, a bird of ill-omen. After exchanging her dress for a loose, white wrapper, she took a seat in front of her dressing table, and letting down her long yellow hair, commenced brushing the beautiful tresses. Then putting down the brush, she leaned her head against the back of her chair and gave rein to her wicked thought. Madgee noted the fire of hatred gleaming in her mistress's eyes. She remained silent, not wishing to bring down a storm of words upon herself. As the clock struck twelve, she rose, and gliding to Blanche, said in a meaning tone,

“Deary, don’t ee worry. Last night Madgee watch with pretty wife. Madgee go now.”

Blanche made no movement to detain her though she was sure that ere the base creature returned, the deadly deed would be done. She tossed restlessly on her bed, for sleep would not come. When the clock struck two, she jumped nervously up.

“I must go and see. This nightmare of doubt and fear is unbearable.”

Noiselessly she descended the stairs, pushed open the door of Mabel’s room, pausing on the threshold. What she saw caused her to stand motionless. Mabel had just drained the last drop in the glass, which she was handing back to Madgee. Blanche saw the evil, triumphant look in the wom-



an's eyes. She knew the dark deed was done.

Without a word, she wheeled about and fled to her own apartments. Pale and trembling, she awaited coming events. For an hour longer she sat, a prey to her wretched emotions. Then the sound of hurrying footsteps were heard in the hall below. She recognized Madgee's peculiar tread, and hurriedly opened the door to admit her.

"What have you done, Madgee? Is she dead?"

"Not yet, deary, but soon. Master want ee come. I come tell ee."

Blanche went. The doctor had been summoned, but had not yet arrived.

Soon after Madgee had given Mabel that last dose in which she had dropped the fatal powder, she noticed an awful change in her countenance. She called Leslie and Mr. Lestrangle, telling them that she believed Mabel was dying.

To witness the husband's grief was heartrending.

"Blanche," he cried, "Blanche! my dear sister. Can you do nothing for her? Do not let her die!"

Poor Mr. Lestrangle's silent grief was none the less harrowing. Blanche pressed her lips more firmly together, maintaining a resolute look. She could not answer Leslie, but she advanced to the bedside where Mabel lay so white and still, and put her finger on her pulse. No sooner had she touched the icy hand than she drew away shuddering and said,



“She is dead!”

In the midst of this trying scene the physician arrived. It needed but a brief examination to decide the case. Seeing his grave face, Leslie in an anguished voice asked,

“Is there no hope?”

The physician hesitated a moment, then said,

“My friend, would I could help your wife. But — she is past all human aid.”

“Heaven help me!” cried Leslie.

Long he sat by the rigid form of his Mabel, his head buried in his hands. They feared to disturb him. It was Blanche who at last went to him. Laying her hand on his arm, she asked that he leave the room for a short time. He understood what was wanted and complied.

“Blanche,” he said, his voice a quiver, “I shall never be happy on earth again. I leave all the preparations for burial to you and Mrs. Grant. Make her look well as you can. Let no one come near me,— I must be alone.”

So Blanche went about directing everything. Once more she was mistress in Leslie’s house. She selected from Mabel’s wardrobe a blue silk trimmed with creamy lace. Thus arrayed for the tomb, her exquisite face framed in a halo of golden hair, Mabel looked like a sleeping angel.

“More beautiful in death even than in life,” thought Blanche. “But it matters little now how beautiful she is. Her reign is ended — mine begins.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### OUTWITTED

Madgee remembered her promise to the Hindoo doctor, and slipped away unobserved, early the next morning. The Hindoo was beginning to think that Madgee might give him the slip. He was cursing his stupidity in not having obtained her address, when he saw her approaching. She entered, and he offered her a seat, asking her in Hindoostanee how the medicine had worked.

“Like a charm,” she replied in the same tongue. She told him he could come that night if he so desired. Giving him directions to find the house, she departed, glad that her errand was done.

No sooner was the door closed behind Madgee than Tungee gave way to glee.

“There is money in the game sure,” he thought. “Madgee is sharp; but old Tungee is sharper,” he chuckled. If his scheme worked, there would be no more toiling for him. He would go back to India and enjoy his gold. He started quite late, equipped with a bunch of keys, a screwdriver, a piece of candle, and a small bottle filled with some liquid from the secret drawer in the wall of his house.



When he arrived at the Lathrop mansion it was past midnight. Madgee was waiting for him. She brought him in through the back door to the great drawingroom, which was draped in deepest mourning. In the center of the room, on a catafalque, rested the elegant casket which contained the remains of beautiful Mabel Lathrop. Cautiously they approached the spot. Tungee stooped down, more closely to scrutinize the face within. Satisfied that all was right, he turned away, following Madgee till he was again out of the house. She was glad her compact with him was now at an end.

Tungee had no mind to return to his lodgings until he knew where the body of Madgee's victim was to be placed. He lingered about till the hour of the funeral, careful not to be seen by Madgee or any of the household. As the procession wended its way slowly along, he followed at a safe distance. Having ascertained the place of burial and marked it well, he went away once more. When night came, it was very dark, consequently favorable for his scheme. A little after twelve o'clock, he arrived at the cemetery. He crept along until he reached the vault where Mabel had been put. Rising slowly, he scanned his surroundings. Seeing no one, he took the candle from his pocket, lighted it, then brought out the bunch of keys. He found one which fitted the lock. Opening the door, he made his way to the casket so lately brought hither. Setting his little candlestick on the lid,



with trembling hands he applied the screwdriver, loosening the screws.

What if he should be discovered while engaged in purloining the body? Or what if, after all, he should be too late to accomplish what he had come for. Great drops of perspiration stood upon his brow; yet he did not desist in his task. When the last screw was removed, he hastily turned back the lid and looked anxiously into the face beneath. Then quickly he took the phial and a spoon from his pocket, pried the cold lips apart, and poured some of the liquid between them. Snatching the inanimate form from the coffin, he placed her on the damp floor, replaced the lid and screws, and picking up his burden, carried her outside. He closed and relocked the door, and at a distance from the cemetery entered a carriage in waiting to convey Mabel and himself to his own wretched abode.

Tungee never breathed freely until he found himself once more at home, and had placed Mabel on the bed he had prepared for her in the garret of his little shop. He placed his hand on her heart, hoping soon to feel its pulsations. He waited in breathless silence.

Suddenly a gleam of hope crossed his swarthy visage. He ran to the little window, and threw it open to admit more air, then returned to the couch. He put his ear to her breast and listened. This time he was not mistaken. The poor heart was beating once more. He ran down stairs, pre-



pared a drink, and hurried back to his patient, pouring some of the mixture between her lips. Then he waited to note the effect. The danger being over, he determined to take back the horse and carriage to the owner.

Tungee had been gone an hour or more when the cry of fire was heard close by his shop. A large crowd gathered. Excitement became general. Before the firemen could reach the squalid place, the fire had become a conflagration. It reached Tungee's home. From the garret into which the blaze was already sending tongues of flame came strange cries. The firemen supposed they were made by some child about to perish. One, a brave youth, espying the little window, determined to go to its rescue.

A ladder was quickly placed in position, up which clambered the fearless youth. Although the room was already filled with smoke, he was in no wise daunted. As he crawled through the window the cry was repeated. He looked in the direction whence the sound came, and to his disgust beheld a huge cat which had taken refuge there. Instinctively he cast a look about, and through the smoke caught sight of Mabel lying on the couch. Snatching a blanket from the bed, he wrapped her in it, and taking her in his arms, ran to the window. The smoke was stifling, but he managed to push through with his burden, being aided by other firemen in descending the ladder. He carried her to a safe distance from the crowd, called a couple



of policemen, and was about to direct them to take her to some respectable hotel when he thought of his kind mother and changed his mind. To her home he directed the policemen to take Mabel.

The firemen were doing their work well, and the fire had nearly subsided, but Tungee's shop, with all his drugs, was destroyed.

Tom Chandler, the young fireman who rescued Mabel, arrived home soon after she had been placed in his mother's care. The good woman had already sent for a physician; meantime, she set to work trying to restore Mabel to consciousness.

Though Dr. Lennox did not practice in the most aristocratic part of the city, he was nevertheless an able physician and a kindhearted man. Mabel's condition awakened his warmest sympathy and interest, and he set to work with all his skill. When at length Mabel showed signs of returning life, he was relieved.

She opened her eyes and looked unconcernedly about her. The good doctor marveled at her composure.

"She is too weak," he thought, "to feel any emotion. Are you feeling better?" he asked.

Mabel stared at him in a dazed way.

"Have I been sick?" queried she.

"A little," he replied.

Soon after he rose to leave. Mrs. Chandler followed him to the door.

"My son is at his breakfast," she said. "When he has finished, he is going back where he found



the young lady, to see if he can learn how she came there. Surely she never belonged in that quarter."

"Your son should investigate the matter closely," said Dr. Lennox. "The case is mysterious. I will call again this afternoon to see my patient."

Tom could find out nothing. No one had ever seen Mabel, or could give any information concerning her.

"The old man who owned the shop where you found the girl was a queer chap," said one person, in answer to Tom's inquiries. "Looked like the very d—l, couldn't hardly understand his talk. Some kind of an Injun, I reckon."

Dr. Lennox found but little change in his patient when he called, later in the day.

"Were you ill before this accident of the fire?" he asked her.

A perplexed look came into her face. There was evidently a struggle to recall the past. In vain! She could remember nothing, not even her own name.

"I do not know. It is all horrible chaos and confusion in my mind." Then she began to weep like a little child. The good doctor was pained.

"Never mind, my dear," he said. "All will be plain some time. There is indication that you have been very ill, and the loss of your memory is undoubtedly due to your sickness. It will come



back with your strength. Think only of getting well."

Dr. Lennox and Tom decided to insert an advertisement of Mabel's rescue in the papers. Her appearance and dress were described, also her strange mental trouble. This certainly could not fail to reach the notice of those concerned in her welfare.

Meanwhile what had become of Tungee, the one who possessed the key to Mabel's ailment, and who knew how to unlock the closed door of her memory? In the secret drawer in his shop there had been a drug which he had intended to use as an antidote to the one which old Madgee had administered. When he returned home and found his shop consumed to ashes, and learned of the rescue of a young woman, the danger of his situation stared him in the face. He dared not linger, but made good his escape. He was sharp enough to know that the finding of Mabel in his house would cast dark suspicions on him, who had come from the land of the Thugs.



## CHAPTER XIX

### BLANCHE TRIES ANOTHER PLAN

A few days after the burial of his wife, Leslie Lathrop sat reading the newspaper. He was about to throw the paper aside, when he caught sight of the advertisement placed in the paper by Dr. Lennox and Tom Chandler.

“Rescue of a beautiful young woman by a gallant fireman, at the late fire on —— Street. The young lady has been stricken with loss of memory and is at present in a very weak condition. When rescued, she wore a pale blue silk trimmed with costly lace. She is of fair complexion, golden hair and dark eyes. Friends anxious to recover her, will find her at Mrs. Chandler’s, No. 50 South H. Street, New York.”

The description struck Leslie, it was so wonderfully like Mabel, but there was no pitying Angel to whisper to him the truth.

The home was so lonely, he was seriously thinking of going abroad for a long journey. Mr. Le-strange had already started in search of his wife.

On his way to his room, Leslie passed the nursery. The door being ajar, the sound of a motherly voice within reached his ears. The picture he saw was good Mrs. Grant holding baby Pansy, and lavishing fond caresses on the little one.



“Poor little lamb,” crooned she. “No mother and might as well say no father, for all he seems to care for you. But Nanny won’t forsake you, my precious. I will be a mother to you as I was to your own mother.”

The words pierced Leslie’s heart.

“I have been a selfish brute!” he thought. Not waiting to hear any more, he walked into the room. Mrs. Grant blushed confusedly. She feared a reproof for the words he surely must have heard. Seeing her embarrassment, he hastened to say,

“You are right, my good woman. My conduct towards my child has been selfish and wrong.”

He stooped down and fondly caressed the lovely babe. “My motherless darling,” he went on, “I will not abandon you. What was I thinking of? — From this day you shall have no cause to accuse me of heartlessness, Mrs. Grant.”

“I — beg — your pardon, Mr. Lathrop,” she stammered; “I meant no offense; but it did seem hard that Pansy should be fatherless as well as without a mother.”

After this, Leslie’s little daughter was no longer neglected. He was surprised to see how fond he was becoming of her. This turn in affairs did not please Blanche. Was she rid of one rival, only to have another cross her path? She set her white teeth together hard.

“I will not endure it! I hate that young one as much as ever I did Mabel.”

“What ee trouble now?” croaked old Madgee



from her perch on her stool in her mistress' room. "D'ee think little pabee in ee way same as mother? Papee in ee way, Madgee doctor same as mother."

The wrinkled hag's face was so hideous that most mortals would have shrunk from her and her evil suggestion. But not Blanche, already a murderess at heart. What was the little life to her, when it stood in the way of her selfish ambition? She only said,

"Madgee, I hate the child!"

The wily woman needed to hear no more.

After Madgee had left her, the fury of Blanche's jealous passion began to subside. She looked at things from a different point of view. Leslie had changed his mind about going abroad because he would not leave Pansy. If she were taken from him, would he not surely go? She (Blanche) might lose him forever. It might be dangerous, too, to try Madgee's experiment a second time. No, she would pursue another course. She would profess great love for the child, and so work her way into the father's heart.

So Blanche soon made the Hindoo understand that Pansy was not to be tampered with. Then it was that Leslie was treated to pretty scenes of motherly tenderness on the part of the actress Blanche. His face would flush with pleasure when he saw the pretty picture she made with the little child in her arms. He was quick to express his gratitude to her.

"Blanche, I am glad you love Pansy. It warms



my heart to have you take such an unselfish interest in her." He bent down and kissed the baby, who already knew and loved papa. In doing so, his cheek almost brushed that of his sister. Scarcely had the echo of his footsteps died out in the hall than Blanche placed Pansy in Mrs. Grant's arms and went up to her room.

"Eureka! I have found it, the way into Leslie's heart."

Never was a mother more devoted than was Blanche to Pansy. Every day she visited the nursery, petting and caring for her. It was done so naturally as to deceive the very elect. Leslie looked on with joy and a new tenderness for Blanche.

"I can never repay you for what you are doing for my child."

"It is a pleasure to care for the dear little one. She herself repays."

"She is growing to look so much like my lost darling, too. Do you know, Blanche, I cannot feel reconciled to my loss? I hope you will be spared, dear Blanche, from ever knowing a sorrow like mine."

So much grief was written in his face that remorse and pity touched Blanche's heart for the moment, as if her better angel struggled for ascendancy. Then her cruel nature came uppermost.

"Bah!" she thought. "We shall see in a year if his heart shall be so full of tender memories.



The more boo-hooing there is when his wife dies, the sooner the man will marry again. However, I must keep up my show of sympathy, for really, in spite of all his mourning, he is looking with more fondness upon me."

No one would have guessed that such speculative thoughts had ever crossed Blanche's mind when she said,

"I am *so* sorry for you, Leslie."

Plain, honest Mrs. Grant was the only member of the household who was clear-eyed as to Blanche's maneuvering.

"The sly thing! She is trying to cast her spells over Mr. Lathrop. Oh, she is a cunning jade. Why! she never once entered baby's room until she found out Mr. Lathrop had taken the notion of coming in to see Pansy. But these men don't know enough to tell a genuine, good heart from a treacherous one. Blanche can't fool old Nancy with her cooing ways. My eyes are not blinded by her glamour."

"Baby does not lack attention, Mrs. Grant," remarked Leslie pleasantly.

"I should say not," she quickly rejoined. "It seems there is a great deal of attraction in the nursery lately," she added pointedly. "Baby is winning much favor."

Blanche looked daggers at her, and Mrs. Grant knew that her missile had struck home. The faithful nurse understood something of her real character, and Blanche now knew it. On one pretext or



another she meant to induce Leslie to part with her and substitute Madgee in her place.

"It will not do to have that meddlesome thing prying into my affairs. How I wanted to box her ears for her impudent hint. She shall pay for it." She went straight to her room and communicated her purpose to her faithful Madgee. The latter shook her head doubtfully and said,

"Don't know how Madgee do. Little pabee fraid of Madgee always."

"Nonsense," interrupted Blanche. "Come with me to the nursery. We will see how well you can manage the child."

Madgee went reluctantly. She did not fancy Pansy, who went almost into convulsions whenever she went near her.

"Mrs. Grant," said Blanche, "I have brought Madgee to assist you in the care of little Pansy. You confine yourself too closely to her. Madgee has a silly notion that the child is afraid of her."

"Come," she said to her, "take baby and let me see."

Madgee advanced slowly. As soon as Pansy saw her, she began to cry piteously.

"The child must get used to you. Take her up!"

Madgee stretched out her arms to do as bidden. Pansy became so wildly nervous that at the risk of incurring Blanche's displeasure Mrs. Grant interfered.



“Go away, or you will frighten her into fits! Go along, you witch!”

Madgee retreated like a whipped cur; while Blanche recoiled in pretended horror at the show of anger on Mrs. Grant's part.

“Why!” she exclaimed, “I did not know you have so dreadful a temper. I must speak to Mr. Lathrop. You are unfit to have control of a gentle little child.”

Blanche had gained a point. She would paint Mrs. Grant's ebullition of temper and her honest intentions in the blackest of colors. Leslie would see that she was not a fit person to care for his child; then she, Blanche, would have unlimited control in this way of Leslie's child. Mrs. Grant was not slow to see that Blanche meant to work her harm, and became frightened. She clutched at Blanche's sleeve as she started to leave the room.

“Miss Blanche, do not go to Mr. Lathrop in your hasty judgment of me. I meant nothing ill. I was cross at Madgee for scaring baby. I should not have spoken as I did.— Forgive me!”

Blanche was not to be deterred from her purpose.

“Dare not touch me, you perfidious hireling! You are unfit to live in a house with civilized people.” With this crushing remark she left Mrs. Grant to her reflections.

“Mercy me!” groaned the frightened woman. “That girl will not rest till she has driven me out



of the house. What will become of my poor little lamb in her clutches. I wish I had been more guarded in my words."

Blanche went straight to the library, tapping softly for admittance.

"Excuse me, Leslie, for intruding, but I must speak with you about Mrs. Grant. I do not think she is a proper person to have the care of Pansy. Her temper is violent, and its effect on so delicate a creature will be nothing but bad. I took Madgee to the nursery to assist her, and she rudely repulsed my offer, and talked to Madgee in a vile and abusive manner. Who knows but some day you may find your child injured in mind or body?"

A cloud gathered on Leslie's brow; then he said,

"Strange that Mrs. Grant should develop such a temper all of a sudden! She is the last person I should suspect of using abusive language."

Blanche looked at him with an injured air.

"Do you doubt my words? Very well. If you ever have reason to repent you did not heed my warning, you will have no one but yourself to blame." She turned as if to leave him.

"Stay a moment, Blanche. I meant no offense. On the contrary I am thankful to you for the information. I will send for Mrs. Grant, and speak with her about her conduct. I should not like to dismiss her, because she was so fond of Mabel, but I have confidence in your judgment."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Blanche. "So much gained. I will conquer yet."



When summoned to his presence, Mrs. Grant was so distressed that kindhearted Leslie was inclined to let the matter drop, but Blanche's warning in the interest of his motherless child prompted him to speak.

"I have heard an unfavorable report of your temper, Mrs. Grant. What have you to say about it?"

The poor woman burst into tears. She bitterly resented Blanche's report as malicious and unjust, but she dared not express her indignation, lest Leslie believe her vindictive as well as hasty. She was hurt that he should so readily believe her in the wrong. At length she regained control of her tears and said,

"Mr. Lathrop, it grieves me to think that long as I have been in your service, you have not yet acquired a better opinion of me. But you are not to blame. Miss Blanche does not like me and so it's natural to find fault. I own that I spoke crossly to that old slave of hers, but I could not help it. Every time she comes near baby, she nearly scares her into fits. Pansy cried so pitifully, that I told that woman to go away and leave the child alone. Yes, I did call her a heathenish old snake. There! I have told you the plain truth, and dear knows I meant no harm."

Leslie found it difficult not to laugh at the singular, but appropriate appellation given to Madgee. He had never been able to tolerate the old creature, and he was not surprised to hear



Mrs. Grant's marked dislike. However, it would not do to let her see that he sympathized with her in the matter.

"Is baby really so much afraid of Madgee? Blanche thought to render you a service by offering to have her servant assist you."

"Humph! I beg your pardon, Mr. Lathrop; but it don't look like it to me. Miss Blanche never came to see Pansy until she found you visited the child, and now she wants to thrust Madgee upon me when I don't need her. O Mr. Lathrop!" she exclaimed, "be warned by me. Miss Blanche is not the woman you suppose her to be. Under that pretty mask is hidden a false and cruel heart. Believe me, she hated my dear lost mistress, your wife. She hates your child, and she hates me, because she knows I read her, because —"

"Silence!" commanded Leslie. "I did not send for you to slander a noble woman who is all kindness and devotion to my child. Listen! Whatever Blanche dictates to you I am sure will be right; follow her directions. If you do not need Madgee's help, you can say so without getting into a passion. I hope to hear no more complaints about you."

Mrs. Grant was both angry and sorry that her honesty of intention had been so misunderstood.

"Let him fall into her net," she said to herself. "I have tried to save him, but he will not see his danger. I would go away this minute if it were not for baby. I must endure and be silent."



Leslie told Blanche he had decided to keep Mrs. Grant, as she was so fond of Pansy and had been so faithful to his lost Mabel.

“She knows what is required of her,” he said; “so you need apprehend no further trouble on her account.”



## CHAPTER XX

### A BOYISH FANCY

“It is three months since your son brought me to your home from that fire,” said Mabel Lathrop to good Mrs. Chandler. “How strange and perplexing it is that all memory of my past is obliterated. It is like some forgotten dream that one tries to recall. Sometimes it appears as if the mists were on the point of breaking. I can almost grasp the past; then suddenly all is darkness. Stranger yet, in my dreams my mind goes back, but soon as I wake all is vanished and I am left with only the impression of happy dreams. It is terrible!”

Mrs. Chandler’s heart ached with pity and sympathy.

“I must have some kindred somewhere,” Mabel went on. “Why do they not answer the advertisement?”

“Do not grieve, my child. I know your affliction is great; but trust in God. He will not forsake you. Try to think all is for the best. Can you not be contented to remain with us? Be a daughter to me. I love you and I know Tom has all the affection of a brother for you.”

“I cannot remain here and eat the bread of de-



pendence. I have been thinking, now I am well and strong, I ought to earn my own living."

At that juncture, Tom came in. He had heard Mabel's last remark, and it had brought a pang to his heart.

"Tom," said Mrs. Chandler, "Mary and I have been talking so earnestly I did not notice it was tea-time. The child has a notion she is a burden to us. Do try to reason her out of it," and the kindhearted woman bustled out of the room, leaving them together.

"Why do you wish to go?" questioned Tom. "If you can only make up your mind to remain, I will be only too glad to work for you. Mary, I love you so! I cannot bear the thought of losing you."

This sudden declaration startled Mabel, and she raised her eyes to his, full of troubled wonder. Something in the youth's frankness forced a gleam of recollection into her mind of another who had been dear. She pressed her hands to her forehead as if to hold a memory; but already it had passed. She uttered a cry of anguish that made Tom cry out in turn,

"O Mary! What have I said to cause you pain? Forgive me!"

Mabel felt a tender pity for the lad.

"Dear Tom, I have nothing to forgive. It was the shadow of a memory that troubled me. I am grateful and glad to find a dear, good brother in you."



Yes, it was that and not a warmer love.

“You are right, Mary, always, and I will be your brother and do all I can to help you clear away the mystery that surrounds you. There is one thing you must do, and that is you must promise never to speak of going from us till some one comes for you.”

She sat for some time thinking. She was proud and felt the dependence on these generous people. At last reason conquered.

“I do promise you, *brother* Tom.”



## CHAPTER XXI

### ANGERED BEYOND PARDON

Leslie, in his lonely hours, found Blanche an agreeable companion. Her ready tact and sympathy touched him. Often, he was so gently grateful and attentive that she thought her victory nearly won. One day when he had been unusually kind, she said,

“It is time I knew for certain how it stands between us. That dark-eyed wife of his has been hid in her grave nearly a year, and yet he has not spoken to me. How he worshipped her! What would I not give for a look of love from him such as he gave my hated rival!”

Blanche went to the nursery, and taking little Pansy in her arms, descended to the library. When she entered the room, Leslie's face brightened with admiration. Pansy's arms were twined about Blanche's neck and she was cooing in her pretty fashion.

“How fond the child is of her!” thought Leslie.

A sudden idea struck him. Why had Blanche so persistently refused all offers of marriage? Could it be possible she loved him?

His eyes were suddenly opened. The expression



of Blanche's face told him there was more than a sister's affection there. He would find out the truth, and if such was the case, she must no longer deceive herself. Taking Pansy into his arms he said, "Blanche, be seated; I wish to talk to you."

He was embarrassed, for it was difficult to speak out his mind; but at length he found his tongue and then the words came abruptly.

"What is the reason you so persistently turn off all admirers? Have you no intention of ever marrying? I fully appreciate your devotion to Pansy and me; but I cannot permit you to sacrifice your young life for us. The grief that has fallen on mine can never be removed. But for you, Blanche, I see a happy future. Much as I enjoy your companionship, I want to see your future settled. Look up, Blanche! Do you think me a meddler in your affairs?"

Could he have but known the tempest of fury he had aroused in her bosom. Far better had he not spoken. However, there was no trace of anger in her face when she at last raised her eyes and said,

"Leslie, I have no desire to leave you, and it would break my heart to be parted from baby. Why are you so anxious to get rid of me? My heart is in my home and not outside it. I thank you for your thoughtfulness; but don't try to drive me from Pansy," and catching up the child, she glided out of the room.

"It is as I suspected," mused Leslie. "She



cares for me. I am glad I let her know I can never love again. She will transfer her affections to some worthier man."

When alone in her room, Blanche raged.

"He scorns my love, while so many have sued for it. I could curse him!!" Her gaze fell upon a photograph of Leslie's which was on the mantel. Snatching it up, she tore it into a thousand bits. "So perish my love for you! Your blue blood will not allow to love the convict's daughter,—we shall see. I have not refused all offers of marriage to have my plan fail now. I will be his wife, and before another year passes. I will make him atone to me for his indifference. His heart is buried in the grave, is it? Better for him were he too resting in his tomb. This day has been the funeral of my love. From its ashes has arisen a hatred far stronger. How glad Grant would be if she but knew of the gentle hint her master gave me that I was losing my time on him. Ha, ha, ha!"

When the tempest was spent, she bathed her face carefully, dressed herself elegantly and, when the dinner bell rang, she went down to join Leslie in the drawing room, not a vestige of the fierce storm visible.



## CHAPTER XXII

### IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES

“Three long years have passed and not one word have I heard from her,” sighed Mrs. Bentley in her quiet room at a London hotel. “Cast out of my husband’s heart and forsaken by my only child! Can I bear it and live? Mabel’s cruel silence is harder to endure than reproaches would have been. Pride has kept me from seeking her, thinking I could in time learn to be resigned to the separation. Ah me! As well might I try to silence the mighty ocean as endeavor to still the yearning of my heart. Since she will not come to me, I *must* go to her. I must hear from her own lips the decision of her heart. As for him who has brought on me years of suffering, may Heaven help me to forgive.”

She determined to seek Mabel in New York.

. . . . .

Mrs. Bentley once more set foot on her native soil. Now that her mind was bent on seeing her daughter, she felt a burning impatience for the meeting. She obtained a directory and eagerly searched its pages for Leslie’s resident address. Finding it, she wrote it down in her note book, then consulted her watch. There was still time to make



the call before dark, so engaging a carriage, she was driven to Leslie's home.

Mrs. Bentley alighted and ascended the steps. Her heart beat wildly as her hand lifted the knocker. Presently the door opened and she was ushered in. She inquired of the servant if his mistress were at home. Being answered in the affirmative, she wrote a few words on a leaf from her notebook, and asked him to take it to Mrs. Lathrop, at the same time slipping a piece of silver into his hand. The note was taken up to Blanche, who by this time had become Mrs. Lathrop. When the servant handed her the note he said,

“A lady to see you in the drawingroom.”

Blanche motioned dismissal, then opened the note. A frown darkened her brow as she read the words,

“For pity sake do not refuse to see and hear your poor mother, who is waiting for you here.”

Blanche ground her teeth in rage, for she supposed it was her own ill-used parent who had once more ventured to intrude.

“She shall go packing. ‘A lady to see me,’ ha! It will not do to have my guests come and find *her* here.”

When Blanche reached the drawingroom she was in a blind rage. She did not at once notice that the woman waiting was altogether different in figure and dress from her own mother. She went straight to the veiled lady, who was closely observing her.



“Well,” she hissed, “what do you want now? Did I not tell you the last time you came that you had no claim on me?”

By this time, Mrs. Bentley had raised her veil, and was confronting Blanche, who, as she saw her visitor's face, recoiled, her eyes dilating and a ghastly pallor overspreading her countenance. Had the dead Mabel arisen to confront and accuse her of treachery?

“There must be a mistake,” calmly responded Mrs. Bentley. “You are right, I have no claim on you, but —”

“O God of mercy!” shrieked Blanche, as she reeled and fell to the floor.

Mrs. Bentley rang for assistance. Leslie, who had just come home, answered her call. There was no word of greeting from Mrs. Bentley, but she hurriedly said,

“I am glad that you are here and can explain. I came to see Mabel and was waiting for her, when a strange person came into the room and accosted me in a threatening manner, then fainted, when I removed my veil and spoke — She needs assistance.”

Leslie had a strong suspicion who that person was, and knew how insulting she could be. He was soon by Blanche's side, however, and lifted her up to a sofa. She soon revived. Mrs. Bentley remained in the background, not wishing to give her a second shock. Leslie helped Blanche to her



room, bidding Mrs. Bentley wait for him until he returned.

“Who is that?” asked Blanche, after she was comfortably seated in her chair.

“Mabel’s mother,” replied Leslie. “Now that you are better, I must go down and see her. She does not know of Mabel’s death.”

“Always harping on that doleful string,” whimpered Blanche. “Pity the mother did not put in an appearance sooner. She looks so much like your *lost darling*, you might have learned to love her,” she sneeringly remarked.

Leslie paid no heed to the taunt, but went to Mrs. Bentley, who was burning with impatience to hear what he had to tell.

“Ah, Mrs. Bentley,” he went on, “a sad change has taken place in my home since last we met. I wrote to you, but I see you did not receive my letters. How can I tell you that my Mabel, your daughter whom you found to lose again so soon, is — is dead.”

“Dead!! Oh, no, say not so,” said Mrs. Bentley in a pained and hollow voice. “When did it happen?”

“Three years last month.”

A painful silence ensued, then Mrs. Bentley asked,

“Did Mabel recognize me as her mother?”

“Ah, yes! but through some strange fatality the letter you wrote and gave to her got lost. It was



found only a few days before she died. You cannot imagine how happy its contents made her. I promised to find you, and your husband started soon after her death to look for you. We have been looking ever since. Mabel would have been so glad to see you reconciled to Mr. Lestrangle, who is at present in Europe."

The news of Mabel's death was an unexpected blow, and Mrs. Bentley did not at the moment give attention to what he told her about her husband.

"One more question,—who is the woman you call Blanche?"

Leslie colored painfully.

"My wife," he answered in a low, distressed tone.

"Your wife! oh —"

Mrs. Bentley broke off abruptly, wisely forbearing comment. As she was about leaving she asked where she might find the grave of her daughter. Leslie gave her a minute description of the place which she wrote down; then, thanking him coldly, departed.

"I cannot blame Mrs. Bentley for being disappointed in me. She thinks me forgetful and changeable; but she would not let me explain. And I let her go without telling her of Mabel's child. O Mabel! Mabel! When I was falling into the toils of a scheming woman, why were you not permitted to come and breathe a warning in my ear? I made a terrible mistake in marrying through pity."



Into his bitter meditations came a mocking laugh. It was Blanche, restored to her cruel self again.

"Still mourning for the *lost darling*? Has that woman gone? Doubtless you thought me too ill to come down, and you would have a fine chance to tell your ex-mother-in-law what an excellent exchange you have made. Mabel's mother would not thank you for it; ha, ha! You see I am dressed to receive my guests this evening. So cheer up! We must not let the skeleton in our closet be seen."

"Blanche!" cried Leslie, "how can you be so cruel and heartless?"

"Why, have you forgotten my noble parentage? 'Blood tells,' you know."

He shuddered perceptibly.

"You will have to entertain your company alone to-night," he said. "Make what excuses you like for me."

"Going to count over the virtues of your lost darling? Well go," called Blanche after him.

Blanche was keeping her vow that she would make Leslie's life miserable. When a woman is bent on revenge, her methods are the refinement of cruelty. One can bear the dagger thrust which ends existence; but the stings and pricks that lacerate and poison, kept up constantly day after day, wear out soul and body. Blanche had won the game and enjoyed making Leslie unhappy. Scarcely were they pronounced man and wife ere Leslie's torture begun. She was a thorn in his



side, and every day the wound grew deeper and more unbearable. She paid no more attention to little Pansy, but devoted her time to theatres and society. Leslie saw her in her true colors. Things went from bad to worse. Such was the state of affairs a year after his marriage to Blanche and at the time of Mrs. Bentley's call at his home.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### FURTHER REVELATIONS

The cab that brought Mrs. Bentley awaited her pleasure. She gave orders to drive back to the hotel. The cabman whipped up his horses, and they started at a lively pace. The driver, who enjoyed a glass of ale, did not take the direct route, and made excuse to stop at a saloon for the coveted drink. He threw the reins over the dashboard, sprang out of the carriage and said to Mrs. Bentley,

“Please, mum, wud you mind waiting a minit whilst I run in this drug shtore and git some medicine for me sick mother.”

“Certainly not,” responded Mrs. Bentley.

“I’ll be back in a jiffy,” said the knave, banging the cab-door to, and chuckling to himself, thinking how nicely he had “come it over the *foine* lady.”

Scarcely had he stepped into the saloon, when a gang of mischievous urchins came shouting along. One little fellow, intent on a joke, threw a toy torpedo at a comrade’s head. The latter dodged, and the torpedo whizzed past him and struck one of the horses, exploding and frightening the animals so that they started on the run just as the driver was coming out of the saloon. He shouted at the



horses to stop; but he might as well have called to the wind to cease blowing. The spirited horses increased their pace to a break-neck speed. On they flew, like maddened creatures. Mrs. Bentley managed to open the cab-door and looked out, expecting every moment to be dashed to the ground and killed. Still on the horses flew! They had already cleared an incredible distance. Suddenly they sheered so quickly as to upset the cab. Mrs. Bentley was thrown out, and the mad creatures continued their furious race, scattering fragments of the cab as they sped along.

Fortunately for Mrs. Bentley the cab was low; and as it upset, the door which had been opened partially closed, so that she rolled out and was scarcely hurt. Stranger than all else, the upsetting had taken place near Mrs. Chandler's residence. Through the window Tom had witnessed the accident. He rushed out, reaching Mrs. Bentley before any one else. He helped her up, offering the support of his arm.

"I hope you are not much hurt. Do you think you can walk to the house?" indicating his home. "My mother and sister will do all they can to make you comfortable."

"Thank you for your kindness. I'm sure I can walk," she replied.

"Yes, Tom, bring the lady in," said his mother, who now came to meet them. It was getting dusk, and Mabel lighted the lamps. Mrs. Chandler began removing Mrs. Bentley's wraps.



“Mary, will you please bring the light here? I cannot see to unfasten the lady’s veil,” said Mrs. Chandler. Then addressing Mrs. Bentley, she added, “How fortunate that you escaped without any broken bones.”

“Thank God!” murmured Mrs. Bentley. “It was a marvelous escape! I feel only a little soreness in my arm, where it struck the pavement.”

Her voice sounded strangely familiar to Tom and his mother. By this time, Mabel had brought the light, and stood by Mrs. Chandler saying,

“Let me see what help I can be to the lady.”

Her nimble fingers soon succeeded in removing the veil, and as the light fell on Mrs. Bentley’s features, both Mrs. Chandler and Tom gazed curiously at her. Her great resemblance to Mabel struck them with amazement.

“Thank you, dear,” said Mrs. Bentley, her glance falling on her deft helper. She started, looked fixedly, half rose from her seat, her face pale as death, while her trembling lips framed the word “Mabel”; but they could not utter it.

Mabel’s eyes were riveted on her. She noted the resemblance to herself. That and the woman’s agitation stirred up sleeping memory. She was the first to speak. Addressing Mrs. Bentley, she asked,

“Why should the sight of me disturb you so? Is it possible that you know me? Speak!”

Mrs. Bentley was quite as agitated as Mabel,



perhaps more puzzled. Turning to Tom, she asked,

“Did you not tell me the young lady is your sister?”

“Yes, madam; but it is only by adoption. Do you know her?” he asked.

“How strangely you both talk! Do I know her? If I could believe that the grave has given up its dead, I would say that she is — that I know her. But that is impossible! He told me she died three years ago. Then, too, if it is she, why does she not know me?”

“Died three years ago! How strange!” murmured Mabel. “It is three years since you rescued me from that burning house, Tom.” She pressed her hands to her forehead, exclaiming, “If the cloud would only move away!”

She came close to Mrs. Bentley and kneeling down beside her, took her hand, saying imploringly,

“Who am I? Strange as it must seem to you, I do not know. It is queer that during the three long years I have stayed here, no one has ever taken pains to find me. It is a terrible supposition; but sometimes I believe that some one wished to get rid of me and chose this method of casting me out of their lives.”

Mrs. Bentley gasped for breath. Mabel’s words struck her like an electric shock.

“Can it be possible there is truth in what she says? Did they rid themselves of my child that they might wed each other?”



“My dear, I am as much in the dark as yourself. You resemble one I loved and lost. I love you already and mean to help you find your friends.”

Once more addressing Tom, she said,

“Tell me, in what part of the city was that building from which you rescued this young person?”

Tom told her what we already know.

“What!” exclaimed Mrs. Bentley, “did you say that the shop-keeper was a Hindoo doctor?”

“Yes, and the old chap has never been seen since.”

Mrs. Bentley grew still more excited, as he recited the story of the rescue and told how Mabel, or Mary, was dressed.

“Show me the dress this young woman wore when you found her. Stay! At what time of year did you rescue her?”

“In the month of September.”

“The very same month,” she ejaculated.

Mrs. Chandler brought the dress. At sight of it, the mother's eyes filled with tears. How well she remembered seeing Mabel wear just such a one. She examined it closely. It was another link in the chain of events. But the evidence must prove beyond doubt that this was Mabel. A way was so suddenly and clearly presented to her, that she rose eagerly, as if she would be gone. Mabel's lips quivered and she grasped Mrs. Bentley's hand, saying,



"Do not leave, I beg, without giving me a word of encouragement. I was almost sure you knew me."

How the mother longed to tell her! But she dared not. Her suspicions were strong and she resolved to sift the matter to the bottom.

"Be comforted, my dear; I am going to work to find your relatives. Trust in me and do not worry. Please leave me now, with this young man and his mother. I wish to speak to them alone."

When Mabel had retired from the room Mrs. Bentley said,

"I feel I can trust you both, you have so nobly protected that poor girl. I know you will gladly help me clear up the case. Am I right in counting on your secrecy and assistance?"

Both promised to do all they could to help and to keep the secret.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Bentley, "although it seems most improbable, I can almost swear that Mary, as you call her, is my daughter. Well may you start. And I know there has been foul play. She has a husband. I will fathom this mystery, and if she proves to be my child, woe to them who have brought this misery upon her."

"Point to me the dastard who has dared to wrong her, and I will thrash him within an inch of his life!" cried Tom vehemently.

"How can I prove she is my daughter?"

"Why, go to a magistrate. Lay the case before him," suggested Tom.



Mrs. Bentley shook her head.

“Why not go to your daughter’s husband,” put in Mrs. Chandler, “and tell him of your strange discovery? Surely if there is guilt in his heart, it will show.”

But Mrs. Bentley still shook her head. She liked neither of the plans.

“I have a plan; but it involves great risk,” she said. “It will require a person of great nerve and cool determination to carry it through.”

“You have only to command,” said Tom quickly. “There is no risk I will not undertake for Mary’s sake. I am not afraid of danger.”

Mrs. Bentley could but admire the brave young man. She drew a long breath, then said,

“Well, here is my plan. Are you willing to go to the graveyard and hunt up the place where my daughter was buried?” She drew out her notebook in which she had written the number of the vault. “Here it is,” she said. “Northeast corner, No. ——. Dare you undertake it? I will accompany you, and we will go this very night.”

Tom hesitated, but only a little.

“I dare and I will!” he said. “You are right in saying it involves a risk. Have you thought of the dangers that may attend the undertaking?”

“I have. But think you that I can rest while I have reason to believe my child is the victim of a most villainous plot? I cannot be convinced the young lady is not my daughter until I have looked into that vault.”



“You desire to see with your own eyes, otherwise I would offer to go alone. If we mean to find out to-night, we have no time to lose. I will get a conveyance.”

Tom was not gone long, and Mrs. Bentley, wrapped in Mrs. Chandler's long, dark cloak, was soon seated beside him in the light wagon. They traveled in silence until they reached the cemetery. Mrs. Bentley could almost hear her heart beat as she alighted from the carriage.

“This way, follow me!” whispered Tom.

On they walked through the city of the dead, past many a gravestone and monument. At last they reached the spot they sought. Tom produced a bunch of keys, and by the light of the lantern they had provided, proceeded to try them. Mrs. Bentley watched his efforts in breathless suspense. She was becoming nervous. None of the keys fitted.

“It is useless to try these longer,” said Tom despairingly.

“Oh, do not give up — try again!” urged Mrs. Bentley.

“We are only losing time with them. We shall have to give it up. Return home with me, and to-morrow night I will come with some wax, take the impression of the lock, and have a key made that will fit it.”

“If we could only succeed to-night,” persisted Mrs. Bentley.

Tom examined the fastenings again.



"I might remove the hinges," he said doubtfully.

"Do so," urged Mrs. Bentley.

Tom set to work, while his companion held the light for him. The work went on slowly, for the screws were rusty and hard to remove. At last their perseverance was rewarded, the last one dropped to the ground, and the door was loose.

Tom took another survey of his surroundings, then feeling safe to proceed, he pried at the door, making an opening sufficiently wide to let him in. Taking the lantern from his companion's hand, and placing the screwdriver in his pocket, Tom said,

"If you do not like to enter, let me go alone."

"I *must* see," she whispered.

Tom said no more, but led the way. His quick eye was not slow in discerning which coffin was of the most recent date. He motioned to Mrs. Bentley, indicating it. Both went towards it. On the lid was a large silver plate richly engraved. Tom brushed the dust from it, and held the light so Mrs. Bentley could read the inscription:

#### MABEL LATHROP

Died September 21st, 18—

Aged 19 years, 6 months

"I thought this story of Mabel's death was a fabrication; but alas, it is true! Let us go."

Her face had the pallor of the sheeted dead, and the grief and disappointment written upon it made it sadder than the grave. They reached the vault



door, and Mrs. Bentley was just passing out, when the thought came to her,

"Can there be another person in the world such an exact counterpart of my daughter? Impossible! Then, too, that strange coincidence of Mabel's burial and the finding of Mary."

"Have patience with me," she pleaded, as once more she moved towards the casket. "I shall not rest until I am fully convinced. Will you open the coffin? When I have looked within, then I shall be satisfied. Do not wonder at my strange behavior. A knowledge of the world and man's wrong doings render me suspicious."

Once more Tom set to work, and soon all the screws were removed. With nervous fingers he lifted the lid. To his astonishment, he beheld an empty casket. Mrs. Bentley noticing the change in his face advanced and she, too, looked in.

"It is as I thought, and it was God who led me to your house. Your adopted sister is my daughter. Oh! what had she done to them, that they should be so cruel to her? They shall answer to me for their crime. Close the casket now!"

They were soon on their way home from their bold yet successful errand.

Mrs. Chandler was waiting for them. She saw at a glance from their faces that they had made some strange discovery. She soon had the story from their lips. Mabel had retired and they did not awaken her.

"I have news for you," said Mrs. Bentley to



Mabel the following morning. "You know that on seeing you last night I became greatly agitated, and I had reason to be. Oh, Mabel!" unable to control herself any longer, "can you not remember me?"

Mabel's lips trembled and her eyes sought her mother's sorrowfully.

"No, I cannot. I tried — oh, I tried so hard! Something ties up memory — but be kind to me. Tell me who you are, and what you know of my past."

"Yes, darling. Thank God, I have found you. You are my own child, Mabel."

A cry of joy burst from Mabel's lips, and she threw her arms about Mrs. Bentley's neck. Tom and his mother silently quitted the room, leaving mother and daughter alone.

"Oh, mamma! now you can explain everything."

"Dear child, this is one of the things which dampens my joy, the fact that I cannot explain your strange misfortune. What I can tell you would only bring you pain. Can you be satisfied for a time to trust in me, and not perplex yourself over the past? With the help of God, your memory will come back, then you shall know all."

Mabel pressed her hands and said with childish simplicity,

"I will trust you. But this at least you can answer: Have I other relatives besides you, mamma?"

"That is another question which for the present



must remain unanswered. It is a hard requirement; but will you promise not to ask about the past? Trust implicitly in me. At present I believe it best for you to remain in the dark."

"Mamma, I promise, and I will be satisfied with what you deem best for me to know. Do Mrs. Chandler and Tom know?"

"I have told Mrs. Chandler and her son only what was absolutely necessary, and they have promised silence."

"Oh, mama, they have been so kind to me! How can I ever repay them for their care of me?"

"I will see if there is any way in which I can help the brave young man. If money can do it, my purse is at his disposal."

"I know what you can do to help Tom," cried Mabel. "He wishes to attend a medical college; but as yet his means have been insufficient. You can pay the expenses. I am afraid, though, he will not let you, for Tom is very proud."

"I will try what can be done to overcome it," said Mrs. Bentley.

At this juncture, breakfast was announced and they all repaired to the dining-room. The meal over, Mrs. Bentley told of her intention of going to Europe. "A trip on the ocean will do Mabel good," she said.

Though Tom and his mother were sorry to part with her, they fully agreed the change would be of benefit.

In her joy at finding her mother, Mabel had not



counted on the pain it would cost her to leave these true friends. It was a sad parting, but Mrs. Bentley cheered them by promising to return as soon as Mabel should be well again. At her departure, Mrs. Bentley left a letter for Tom with her bankers. In it was a cheque for five thousand dollars. Tears came to Mrs. Chandler's eyes, as she listened to the kind words which accompanied it.

"Shall we accept it?" asked Tom's mother.

"Yes, as a loan. I will repay it when I have a practice."

On the morning succeeding his interview with Mrs. Bentley, Leslie ordered out his carriage, determined to find her and make some explanations, also tell her of his little daughter Pansy.

He visited several hotels, but found not her name upon their registers. At last he struck the right one; but only to learn that she had been out and had not yet returned.

"No use waiting for her," he thought. So he wrote a note asking for an interview. Inclosing his address, he asked the proprietor to have it delivered to her room. Then he took his departure, just as Mrs. Bentley and Mabel were close at hand.

The next day Mrs. Bentley and Mabel with the maid went to their new quarters near the steamer, which was to sail in a few days for Liverpool.

"Mamma," said Mabel, drawing a deep sigh, as they sailed down the beautiful bay, "you do not know how familiar everything is to me — as if I



had been here before. I know I shall enjoy this trip."

"I am sure you will," said her mother.

As the two women sat watching the receding shore, Leslie was thinking that all hope of a reconciliation with Mrs. Bentley was gone.

"She has not answered my note, and it means she will not see me."



## CHAPTER XXIV

### MARY JANE BLOWER

Years passed, Leslie submitting to Blanche's tyranny with the patience of a martyr. But for the consolation he found in his little daughter, his home life was wretched.

Blanche was not free from anxieties. Her constant dread was lest her mother should learn of her marriage and take it into her head to come and see her. Her mother did hear of it, and resolved to try her chances once more. She had a sister residing a short distance away, who was in moderately comfortable circumstances. Abe Blower, her sister's husband, owned a few acres of land outside the village of C——. He was a gardener, and made a good living raising vegetables and selling them to patrons in the village.

Whenever Mrs. Drew was in difficulty, she went to her sister and the latter found some way to help her out of her trouble. Now that she had made up her mind to go and see Blanche, she went to consult with Mrs. Blower about it.

"Well," exclaimed the latter, "bless my soul and body! If I was in your place, in course I would go, and she should take care of me the rest



of my days. I wouldn't scrub my fingers off a washin' for this one and that, when I could be a lady and not work a bit. Look here," setting down the vegetables she was sorting for the market, and standing up with her arms akimbo; "there's Mary Jane that's ben a wantin' to go to the city fur ever so long. You know she's got some high fangled notions in her head, she has. She don't think none of the young folks around here good enough for her. Now, I'm thinkin' she might go along of you, and your darter could get her acquainted with some of them big-bugs she goes with. It would be a dreadful good chance for Mary Jane."

"She would be company for me on the way," quavered Mrs. Drew, as her sister paused for breath. Mary Jane would be lucky if her proud daughter acknowledged her as a relative, let alone introducing her to *big bugs*. She dared not hint her doubts, so she would run the risk of taking the girl with her.

"To be sure she'd be company for you," went on Mrs. Blower. "You know what a talker she is. She can talk me blind. When do you think of goin'?"

"Soon as I can get ready."

"Well now, look here, Blower is getting to be so shiftless, he'd just as soon sell them vegetables at half price to the market, as peddle them around. Now, I'm a goin' myself. I ain't 'fraid to peddle. This load will bring money enough to pay Mary



Jane's passage on the cars. As to clothes, she's got that nice muslin dress that'll do to go to them parties Blanche makes. Then she's got her blue delaine for Sundays, and three nice calico dresses most new. She won't lack clothes. I shan't say anything to her about her going till I come hum tomorrow night. She ain't never ben on the cars. If I git the pay for my vegetables, which I expect to, there'll be nothing to hinder you going right away. I'd like to have my oldest girl marry well. It would help her sisters along, and kinder raise us up in the world. I don't see why she couldn't do as well as your girl. I'm sure she's as good lookin', judgin' from the pictar I've seen of Blanche."

"My daughter is very handsome and hardly seems like one of us. She has been brought up so differently," meekly protested Mrs. Drew.

"You don't mean to say because them rich folks fetched her up, it makes her any better then us? As for schoolin', I don't believe she's ahead of Mary Jane. She's quit readin' to school, and she's gone through the big 'rithmetic, and she ken make the map of New York just like in the g'ography. Every body sez what a good scholar Mary Jane is."

"Oh, I don't mean that," sighed Mrs. Drew, thinking of Blanche's haughty, overbearing manner, "I know Mary Jane is a good girl and quite a scholar but — never mind. I will go home and get ready."



Mrs. Drew was a meek little woman with quiet manners and had once been pretty. She and her sister were left orphans when little girls. On account of her robust appearance, Mrs. Blower had been adopted by farmers. She had married when quite young. Her sister met with a different fate, had been employed as a nurse-girl in good families. From these she had acquired her ladylike manner. She, too, had married young. She was the opposite of her homely sister, who was tall and muscular, with prominent, determined features and who was capable of doing battle with any amount of hardship.

Soon as Mrs. Drew had gone, she loaded the wagon with the vegetables, and arranged everything to take an early start next day. Her husband was easy going and was not in the least ruffled when, at four o'clock the next morning, she jumped out of bed, shook him vigorously, at the same time applying the lash of her tongue.

"Git up there, lazy bones! Don't you know I've got to be off early? Go and feed that horse, whilst I make me a cup of tea, and don't forget to put a bundle of hay in the wagon and some oats to feed him when I get there; for he won't have time to eat much before I start."

So urged, Mr. Blower was up and dressed and went at once to do her bidding. In less than an hour, Mrs. Blower, dressed in a long water-proof cloak, an ancient bonnet on her head, was perched on the board laid across the front of the wagon for



a seat, and was all ready to start on her journey.

“Abram,” she said to her husband, “be sure and tell Mary Jane to skim the milk on the top shelf, and not to forget to feed them chickens. Tell her to make Johnny-cake for breakfast, ’cause they won’t be bread enough to last all day; and to bile the young ones each an egg for their dinner to school, and to be sure to get them off early enough and — well — I guess that’s all. Dear me! seems as I was forgettin’ something. Well, never mind,” and she started off. She had scarcely gone a rod, when she jerked her horse back and shouted to Abram who was going into the house.

“Abram!! I knew I’d forgot something. Tell Mary Jane to go and tell Miss Brown to tell Miss Ransom that I can’t go to her quilting to day, ’cause I’ve got to go an sell these vegetables. Do you hear?”

“Yes,” came the answer from the man who hurriedly closed the door for fear of being pestered with more errands. He knew his peace of mind for the coming week depended on his not forgetting any, and he was quite sure he could not remember half of them.

Mrs. Blower was lucky in disposing of her vegetables, and returned home early, flushed and pleased with the proceeds of her trip.

The remainder of the day she divided up between her household duties and the preparations for Mary Jane’s departure on the following day with Mrs. Drew.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LEOPARD DOES NOT CHANGE HER SPOTS

Mary Jane imagined great pleasure was in store for her, because the people where she was going were very rich, and her mother had hinted she might do as well as had her cousin.

She chatted incessantly, to the annoyance of her aunt who, as they neared their destination, felt a mortal terror lest Blanche should turn the cold shoulder on her again. She wished from the bottom of her heart that her sister had kept Mary Jane at home. Then, should Blanche not be disposed to receive her, there would be no one to witness her shame and sorrow.

“What’s the matter, aunt?” exclaimed Mary Jane. “I’ve been talking to you and you don’t seem to hear. Any one would think you were going to a funeral instead of going to visit a rich —” The sentence was broken off by the stopping of the train. They were in New York. They got into a hack and were soon speeding toward Blanche’s home. Mary Jane was awed by the magnificence of the house and its surroundings.

“Are you sure you haven’t made a mistake? Is it here that cousin lives?”



“Yes,” answered the trembling mother.

The cabman helped them out, carried the small trunk, containing all the clothing the two had brought, and deposited it on the stone steps. Mrs. Drew rang the bell and the two were ushered in by a maid who eyed them saucily. They inquired for Mrs. Lathrop, and Mrs. Drew asked to see her.

The girl hurried off to find her mistress.

Blanche was in the sittingroom, elegantly dressed and reclining on a sofa reading a novel. The girl tapped at the door. “Two women wish to speak with you.”

“Are they from the orphans’ home?” Blanche inquired.

“I think not. I think they are looking for work. They have probably seen your advertisement for a kitchen girl and have come to get the place.”

Blanche laid the book aside, and went graciously enough to them. Imagine her consternation when she recognized her mother. She dropped into a chair trembling with rage.

“Who have you with you, and what has brought you?” were the words with which she greeted her mother. Mary Jane looked on in wonder. Being an affectionate, kindhearted girl, she could not understand this contemptuous treatment of the mother by her daughter.

“This is Mary Jane Blower, your cousin,” replied Mrs. Drew. “She wanted to see the city and



I brought her with me. Have you no word of welcome for me? ”

Blanche did not heed the question or the trembling hand outstretched to her. These ill-dressed folks, her kindred, made her shudder. The maid's remark, “some one looking for work,” rankled in her consciousness. Was she to be troubled not only by her mother, but by a flock of other relatives? Her hot temper was on the point of blazing out, when a thought caused her to repress the stinging words which rose to her lips.

“Now listen to me. I have told you before that your coming might mar my prospects. Although I am now Mrs. Lathrop safe enough, were my husband to know that I received you here, he would be very angry and would doubtless show you the door. It is money you are after I know! I will fill your pocketbook and you must return home tomorrow. If I keep you both it will set the servants talking. There is nothing here you can do, but it is different with the girl. I can find employment for her; but she must promise not to reveal her relationship to me.”

Mary Jane's cheeks blazed with indignation, and her heart rebelled against the mercenary woman who treated her mother so shamefully; but the girl dared not express her thoughts. There was no alternative for the present but to accept Blanche's humiliating terms, as she had used her money and could not pay the fare back.

Poor Mrs. Drew had hoped against hope, that



Blanche would give her a home near her. That others should witness her daughter's cruel treatment of her, filled her heart with sorrow and shame. However, she would make one more effort to touch her heart.

"You have judged me wrongly. It is not money I seek." Then raising her eyes imploringly she added, "What I want is a place in your heart, to be near you. Will you deny this to your own mother?"

Her mother's appeal made Blanche feel ill at ease; but her pride rose and she steeled her heart against her.

"I cannot keep you. Would you through obstinacy and for foolish whims subject me to ridicule? How could I hold my position in society were my low parentage to become known, which your staying here would disclose? I will give you plenty of money to return, but do not come again. When you are in want, let me know and I will send you more." She drew out her jewelled purse and took some bills from it.

The light died out of Mrs. Drew's face. She rose and in a voice full of bitterness and sorrow, said, "Since you refuse me, keep your money. I will not touch it, neither will I remain longer under your roof. I do not curse you, but remember the hour may come when you will wish you had never lived to be a curse to others."

Turning to Mary Jane, who was crying as if her heart would break, she said,



"I am sorry I brought you. If I had the money to pay your way back I would give it to you, but I have none. You will soon earn enough to get home. Good bye, child, and keep up courage."

After the door closed behind her, Blanche felt a sort of relief that her mother was gone. "'Beggars should not be choosers.' She ought to have taken the money I offered her; but I presume she felt out of place here. No doubt you will, too, until you are given your work. Remember what I told you about disclosing that you are my cousin. I will send the housekeeper to you and she will take you to the kitchen where your work will be."

So saying, Blanche swept out of the room as if she were a queen granting a favor to her lowest menial. Mary Jane shook her fist after her retreating figure and determined to make an appeal to the housekeeper. But alas, when Mrs. Grimm did make her appearance in a stiff rustling black silk, and addressed her in a manner more chilling and repellant than that of the mistress, her heart sank within her.

"I can never ask a favor of the old iceberg." So she followed the woman down to the kitchen.

At night, when her task was done, she retired to the little room assigned to her in the servants' wing. Safe from intruders, she sat down on the edge of the bed, and burst into a fit of passionate weeping. She was terribly homesick in that great house with all those strangers. The trip had



brought her nothing but disappointment. She longed to be back home where, if her parents were poor and uncultured, at least their hearts were kind and sympathetic. She was cured of wanting to seek after grandeur.

Then came the thought of her aunt, cast out of her daughter's home and no doubt wandering in the streets, for she had no money, and that meant no food and no shelter, unless she begged for them.

“It is a burning shame!”

The sound of music and gay voices from the drawingroom reached her. She knew that the mistress of the house was entertaining company. She shuddered at the thought of such heartlessness, and slipping down upon her knees, prayed God to keep her from being like her cousin — not forgetting to ask Him to watch over the wandering mother, and guide her steps to some haven of refuge.

Meanwhile, Blanche did not bother herself with the thought of her mother. She had had a consultation with her housekeeper, who ruled in petty tyranny over those under her, and whom she trusted implicitly.

“Mrs. Grimm,” she said, when she sent her to Mary Jane, “I want you to make that girl understand her place at once. She is from the country, and if we do not spoil her by giving her too many privileges, she will make a good servant. I place her in your charge.”



“You may depend upon it, she shall be kept where she belongs. I will take care that she is made to know it.”

One morning Mrs. Grimm went down to the kitchen with some paper to make a memorandum of articles wanted for the pantry. A longing look came into Mary Jane's eyes as she saw the writing paper. She had rummaged through her trunk to find some, but alas, she had forgotten to bring any with her. She waited till Mrs. Grimm had finished, then made her request as politely as she knew how.

“Please, ma'am, will you let me have a sheet of paper and an envelope? I will pay you for them.”

Mrs. Grimm assumed her most annihilating expression.

“Our servants are not allowed to send out letters until they have been here long enough for us to test their honesty. No, young girl, you cannot have any paper, and will not be permitted to write home for a month to come.”

The hot blood rushed to Mary Jane's face, and hotter words rose to her lips; but once more she checked them. Her helpless situation again stared her in the face. She turned away to her work. As she passed the diningroom door, she saw a woman near it, and knew from her pitying glance that she must have heard what Mrs. Grimm had said. The woman motioned her to be cautious and instantly vanished.



“There is one kind person at least in this house,” thought Mary Jane.

She went about her work a little more cheerfully the rest of the day, but still she saw nothing of her new friend, who was none other than good Mrs. Grant, who had come down to the diningroom to get grapes for Pansy.

As the homesick girl sat in her little bedroom that night, there came a light tap on the door. Opening it, she recognized in her visitor the unknown friend. At sight of Mrs. Grant’s kindly countenance, she flung her arms about her neck, and wept piteously. The motherly woman did not repulse her, and sought to comfort her in a practical manner. She had brought writing materials and put them into her hands.

“I will post your letter myself, so you may be sure your folks will get it,” she said.

“Have you time to wait till I write it?”

“Certainly, poor child.”

The girl hastily penned a few words to her mother, telling her how unfortunately things had turned out. Suddenly she paused in her writing.

“What is it, child?” asked Mrs. Grant.

“If ma sends me the money, how am I to get it? If it is put in a letter, they may not give it to me, for they want to keep me here.”

“Have the letter inclosed in one addressed to me,” suggested Mrs. Grant. “No one will mistrust.”



A few minutes later the new friends parted, Mrs. Grant carrying the missive which was to open Mrs. Blower's eyes to the state of affairs in the Lathrop Mansion.

As Leslie sat in the library one day, soon after Blanche had sent off her mother, she saw him scrutinize her in an unusual way.

"Why do you look at me so?" she inquired sharply.

"Oh, I was trying to think whom I saw to-day that reminded me of you. I know now. Poor woman, it was too bad, but no matter, it cannot possibly interest you."

"But I wish to know. I do not like mysteries — who was it?"

"As I got off the train this afternoon, I saw two men lifting an insensible woman from the platform of the railway depot. I hurried up to offer assistance. The men carried her into the depot and put her on one of the seats. Some one ran after a physician; but before he arrived, the poor creature had breathed her last. No one knew her, and as there was nothing about her person to reveal her identity, she was sent to the morgue to await identification. Something in your face recalled the woman's. Were your mother living in New York, I should say it was she. Strange that she has never been to see you."

Blanche shaded her face with her hand, so he did not see the grey pallor that settled on it. Her voice shook when she said, "Mine must be an



attractive face, since you are ready to liken it to that of the first vagrant you chance to meet," and rising, hastily she left the room.

She determined to know if it were really her mother, so consulted old Madgee.

"Madgee find out, Madgee go much early tomorrow."

Accordingly she went to the morgue. Her piercing eyes scanned the features of the poor mortals laid out for inspection. Yes, it was Mrs. Drew, a peaceful look on her still comely features. No doubt she had died from the effects of exhaustion and a broken heart.

Madgee hastened home with her news.

Blanche sat down and wrote on a slip of paper this direction:

"Please use this money to give No. 5 a decent burial." She then described her mother's dress to make sure no mistake would be made. Inclosing a bank bill and the note in an envelope, she addressed it to the director of the morgue. Then carefully sealing and stamping it, she sent Madgee to post it.

"No one will mistrust that she was my mother," thought Blanche, with a sigh of relief. The constant dread of her mother's visits would vex and trouble her no more.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### MRS. BLOWER VISITS THE METROPOLIS

On the Saturday following Mary Jane's departure, Mr. Blower went to the village to get a few groceries and the mail. The expected letter from his daughter was handed him.

As he neared home the children ran out to meet him.

"Did you git a letter, pa?" they shouted.

Drawing it from his pocket he waved it in the air then tossed it to the older girl.

"Open it, child, and read it," said the mother who was now at the door.

The girl tore open the envelope and read aloud. The whole family was a unit in its indignation. Mrs. Blower, unable to control her anger, burst forth,

"Now, if that ain't dreadful! To think that the miserable upstart should use her own mother and her own cousin that way. And neither of them's got spunk enough to tell her what's what. Pity I wasn't there to give her a piece of my mind. I wonder if Mary Jane Blower isn't as good as Blanche Lathrop, a daughter of a jail-bird! It wouldn't a took me long to tell of it either. I



wonder if Mary Jane is simple enough to think I'll send her money and run the risk of her never gettin' it. No! I'm a goin' myself after her. If that stuck-up cornvict's girl don't git a settin' out, it'll be a caution. Mary Jane sez that she sez her husband is too proud for her to keep her mother there. I'll show him when I git there that the Blowers are as good as the Lathrops. It's a good thing we had the luck to sell them chickens this week. That, with what's comin' to you from Jones 'll be enough to take me there and back, and fetch her too. To think that she wouldn't even let her have a sheet of paper to write hum! The stingy, stuck-up thing! Well, I hope that'll cure Mary Jane of her high notions. It's lucky our girl run acrost some one who took pity on her. The land knows what'd become of her there alone. She'd a died of humsickness afore we'd have known a thing about it. I wonder where her aunt went to after Blanche sent her off! I must find her when I go. How she must have felt to have her girl use her so!"

"You're not used to travelin'," ventured Mr. Blower.

"Well, no matter, I'll have to get used to it. I shell start Tuesday mornin'."

Monday, she busied herself getting ready. She wanted her Sunday bonnet re-trimmed. She had heard that red was fashionable. Borrowing a wreath of roses from her daughter's hat, she took her bonnet, made of green silk, which had done



service for a score of years, to the village milliner and insisted on having it trimmed with the wreath. The latter suggested more subdued colors; but her advice was not taken. Mrs. Blower would have it put on, saying that since she had it, it was better to use it than go to the expense of something new and not half so pretty.

The result was gorgeous in the extreme, and Mrs. Blower was highly pleased.

On Tuesday morning, an hour and a half before train-time, she was at the depot ready to start on her journey. On her arm she carried a lunch basket, containing enough food for the round trip. Her tall, aggressive figure was arrayed in a purple dress, the skirt trimmed with several rows of light-blue braid; from her shoulders, hung a bright yellow shawl; and on her head was perched the green silk bonnet with the wreath of red roses.

She had never before been on a train of cars. She became very impatient, and scolded a great deal because "them train folks kept people waiting so long."

When the train did come, she was in such haste to get on for fear of being left, that she slipped on the car-steps, hitting the conductor on the head with her basket, knocking off his cap. To keep from falling, she clutched at the limbs of a young man who stood on the edge of the platform. The sudden force of her tug lifted him



from his feet, and, in the twinkling of an eye, Mrs. Blower's one hundred and seventy-five pounds avoirdupois brought him down with her in her fall. This was not the end of the disaster. An old couple who were about to take the same train stood just behind, and their near proximity to the tumbling pair gave them a shock, too. The fringe of Mrs. Blower's shawl got tangled around the old gentleman's coat-buttons, and, as he went to step back to avoid a collision, he was jerked forward and fell on his knees so suddenly that his cane flew one way, and his hat and wig another. The misfortune extended to his faithful spouse who had hold of his arm. In falling, he hit her on the mouth with his elbow, sending her false teeth flying. Lookers on could not suppress their laughter — the scene was too ludicrous.

The young man was the first to regain his feet. He was very red and crest-fallen as he surveyed the transformation his fashionable suit of clothes had undergone during his revolution in the dust.

Poor Mrs. Blower, who had been the cause of all these mishaps, picked herself up as quickly as possible. She looked neither to right nor left, offered no excuses, but with consternation on her homely face, lest after all the train should start without her, she made another frantic effort to get on, succeeding without further disaster.

The old couple postponed their trip as the old



lady could not be persuaded to go without her teeth, and the old gentleman's wig needed repairing.

Mrs. Blower dropped into the first seat near the door, her bonnet all awry, and her face streaked with dust.

A mischievous boy near by, said loud enough to be heard all over the car,

"The menagerie door's been left open."

This set the people laughing, but Mrs. Blower remained unconcerned. She did not understand the joke applied to her.

By the time the train was well under way, she had regained her self-control and opened a conversation with her nearest neighbor.

A young man came into the car, and all the seats being taken, Mrs. Blower put her basket down and offered him a place by her.

"Thank you, madam, you are very kind, but I cannot ride backwards without being car sick."

"Well, I'll turn the seat over. I know how to do it, 'cause I saw somebody turn one over," and she banged it in the right position.

"There now! You can set down."

He dropped into the seat and taking a paper from his pocket commenced reading.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Blower, "how can you read? I don't know how, but if I did, I couldn't with all this rumbling about my ears."

"I am used to it," replied the young man without looking up.



Mrs. Blower was silent for a moment, then she took up her basket and fished from its depths two large twisted doughnuts, offering one to her companion.

"Why, don't you like fried cakes?" she asked, seeing he declined it. "There's nothing Abram likes better."

She stowed one back in her basket, and ate the other. When she had finished eating, she was thirsty. She had seen several persons go to the water tank at the other end of the car. Addressing her companion she asked,

"Will you watch my basket while I go for a drink? I feel safe to leave it with you."

Without waiting for an answer, she got up and crowded past, not giving the young man time to step out. Unused to the jolting of the cars, she pitched headlong into a seat, bumping her head against its occupants. Undaunted, she attempted to go on. Scarcely had she straightened up, when she fell over on the opposite side. Despairing of being able to reach the tank, in fact, her experience had taken her thirst away, she turned back.

"Ten cents to see the show," shouted the mischievous boy.

When she had regained her seat, she innocently remarked,

"I heard that boy sayin' a little while ago that the menagerie door got left open, and now he says



it's ten cents to see the show. Is there goin' to be a show in the city?"

"I do not know," replied the young man, smiling.

"Ain't you from the city?" she asked. "You look as if you was."

"Yes, my home is in New York."

"Well, I'm goin' there to bring my darter, Mary Jane, hum. She went to make her cousin, Mrs. Lathrop, a visit; but they are so stuck up, they don't know how to use a body decent. Don't you bleve, they've sot her to work in the kitchen? They say them Lathrops is awful proud folks. Is it so?"

"I do not know any Lathrop family in New York," he responded.

"Why, you don't say so! It's queer, livin' in the same place, I thought everybody knowed 'em. They're dreadful rich, they say. I was a goin' to ask you to show me where they lived; but I expect I can find them by askin' folks."

It was all the young man could do to keep from laughing outright; still he pitied her and resolved to help her all he could.

"Have you their address?" he asked.

"No, I haven't."

"Well, then, you will have to consult a directory."

"I suppose I will," she said. "Do you think he'll know the way there?"

He bit his lip in his endeavor to keep a straight



face. As he surveyed her barbaric gaudiness of attire, he thought,

"The boy is right. She looks as if she had just escaped from some menagerie." She reminded him of a huge, green headed parrot. "Poor thing! She will never leave New York alive. I must place her in charge of a policeman when she gets off the train." Then he explained what a directory is.

"I can't afford to buy one!" Mrs. Blower broke in aghast. "I've jest got money enough to pay mine and Mary Jane's fare back."

"You will not have to purchase the book. I will find one for you."

"Thank you. It ain't every day young men are kind to old people. I shan't forgit how good you've ben."

When they arrived in the great city, he put her in charge of a policeman who happened to know Leslie Lathrop, so Mrs. Blower safely reached her destination. She was struck with the magnificence of the place.

"My gracious!" she exclaimed, "what an awful big house! Air we right?"

The man assured her they were, so Mrs. Blower and the basket got out of the cab. The cabman stood waiting for his pay. When he saw she offered none, but only thanked him, he asked her for it. She looked at him in honest surprise. "I didn't know as I'd have to pay you for the ride. Where I come frum, a man would be ashamed to



ask a woman to pay for lettin' her ride a piece with him."

The cabman burst out laughing. Mrs. Blower's looks, her dress, her speech, surpassed anything he had ever seen in the shape of a female patron.

"But my good woman," he argued, "where would my daily bread come from, were I to use my cab to give free rides to every goodlooking, well dressed lady that comes along?"

"Ah! that's what you do for a livin', eh? I didn't know it. How much is it? My havin' to pay you is goin' to put me short of money; but maybe I can banter the ticket man down, seein' we'll be two when we go back, and you'd oughter have your pay."

Mrs. Blower ascended the steps and rapped several times. As no one came to answer, she tried to open the door. Of course, it was locked. She rapped again and again, still no one came.

"They've locked the door a purpose," she muttered. "I'll bet they see me a comin' and don't want to let me in. Maybe they mistrust I'm Mary Jane's mother. Perhaps I can make her hear. Mary Jane! Mary Jane!!" she shouted at the top of her voice. She listened, then shouted again. She was drawing in a long breath, preparatory for a louder shout, when footsteps behind her caused her to turn around to see who was coming.

"What is the trouble, my good woman?" asked



Leslie, for it was he who now appeared on the scene.

“There’s trouble enough,” replied the exasperated Mrs. Blower. “Here I’ve ben a knockin’ and callin’ this half hour, and the mean folks that’s got my girl shut up here, have locked the door and won’t let me in.”

Leslie’s first impression was that the woman was insane. He was about to call a policeman when she asked,

“Air you any connection to them Lathrops? I’m Sarah Ann Blower, Leslie Lathrop’s wife’s mother’s sister, and mother to Mary Jane Blower that they’ve got shut up in their kitchen doin’ their work. I’ll tell ’em what I think of ’em, if I can ever get in. The mean, onprincipled, stingy, stuck-up, lazy — folks!” She paused unable to think of anything else to call them.

Leslie’s eyes opened wide in astonishment.

“I am Leslie Lathrop,” he said, “but believe me I had no knowledge of your daughter’s presence in my house until you said so. I am sorry if what you have told me is true.”

These words somewhat mollified the angry woman.

“Well, I don’t doubt what you say, mister. I don’t suppose your wife told you what she done. She forbid Mary Jane to tell any one she was her cousin for fear you’d find it out. She says you’re so proud, that if you knowed she had any of her folks here, you’d turn them out doors. That’s



why she sent her mother off when she came with Mary Jane. You don't look nor talk proud a bit."

"When did my wife's mother and your daughter come here?" questioned Leslie.

"A week ago."

A dreadful truth was dawning upon him. The scene at the railway depot came up before him. Blanche must have known it was her mother he had seen dead, from the description he gave her. Her heartlessness made him shudder.

"You must not remain standing," he said. Producing his night-key, he ushered Mrs. Blower into the hall.

"Sit down, madam," pointing to a chair. "I will find your daughter and bring her to you."

He soon returned with Mary Jane who, on seeing who the visitor was, called out joyfully,

"Oh, mother! mother! I'm so glad. I knew you'd come."

Leslie's eyes moistened at sight of their affectionate greeting. He waited until their excitement had somewhat subsided, then said in a grave voice,

"Tell me about the unkind treatment you have been subjected to — I have a right to know."

So then Mary Jane told him the whole story. Cruel as Leslie knew Blanche to be, he had not thought her capable of such meanness. Alas! had he but guessed the whole truth.

"I am pained beyond expression to think that you have been treated so shamefully in my house.



Mary Jane, take your mother to your room and see to her comfort." Taking a hundred dollars from his pocket book, he gave it to Mrs. Blower, saying, "Take this and use it for yourself and daughter. You will not care to make a long stay here, and whenever you wish to return, my carriage will be at your service to take you."

"We'll go to-morrow mornin'. I can't stay here longer. If I did I'd give that — beg pardon, sir, I was a goin' to call your wife a hard name. You are an honest man and a gentleman, so I'll hold my tongue. I'll start off in the mornin' with Mary Jane and not say a word to her. I am much obliged to you for the money, and I ain't goin' to be silly enough to make believe that I don't want to take it, for I do."

Leslie found himself thinking kindly of the woman whose language, though rude, was so free from dissimulation. He wished from the bottom of his heart that Blanche had less of fashionable deceit and more of her aunt's truthfulness.

As Leslie sat musing over the disappointments of his life, Blanche entered the room elegantly dressed.

"In one of your dark moods again!" she said petulantly. "You know this is my evening to attend the opera. Why do you not get ready, instead of sitting there like the chief mourner at a funeral?"

"I am not going to the opera to-night. Under present circumstances, it would be in better taste



for *you* to remain at home, too. Pray sit down."

She was disturbed. Had Mary Jane been gossiping?

"It is time to go. If you prefer remaining at home, I am sure I have no objections. I shall go whether my lord thinks I ought or not." Bowing low in derision, she left him alone.

Leslie bit his lip. Forbearance was at an end.

"To be bound to such a woman as that!" he cried. "She has been a curse to me since the day I made her my wife, but, for my child's sake, the world must not mistrust the awful gulf that separates us. Oh, how cruelly she has deceived me!"

He had a great comfort in Pansy, the sound of whose sweet voice at that moment fell like soothing music on his ears.

"Papa! pease let 'ou little durl tum in. I want to see papa."

Leslie forgot the pain at his heart, as he clasped her in his arms.

"I dess 'ou glad to see 'ou little durl. Mamma Blanche won't let baby in a bit, but 'ou do! I love 'ou, papa."

He amused her as well as he could, for his child was the one bright spot in his life. He showed her pictures and books until she was sleepy. Then the little golden head drooped and she fell asleep in his arms, and he carried her to the nursery to Mrs. Grant.

Mrs. Blower and her daughter left at an early



hour next day. Blanche was in ignorance of her aunt's visit, till after she had gone.

When she learned that Leslie had sent his carriage to convey Mary Jane and her mother to the train, she was very angry with him and with herself. She went straight to the sitting room where she found Leslie awaiting her.

"Why did you send the girl away in our carriage? Were you afraid people would not know they are your wife's relatives if you failed to do them the honor? Have you nothing to do but hang about the kitchen with the servants?"

She grew more and more angry as she went on, her language becoming so abusive and insolent, that Leslie would bear it no longer.

So the breach widened between the ill-assorted pair. What he had intended to say to Blanche about her mother remained unsaid.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### DR. CHANDLER

The Chandlers had relatives residing in northern New York. They had visited them occasionally, and Tom was enchanted with the scenery, and determined to purchase a house and lot in the village of P. which had been the home of Mrs. Chandler's childhood. A good opportunity offering, he bought a pretty cottage adjoining her sister's place, and happily surprised his mother by putting into her hands the title deeds.

Mrs. Chandler's eyes shone with pride and pleasure. How good Tom was to her and everybody! With her home so near her sister, she could better bear Tom's necessary absence.

In due time he graduated with high honors from the medical college. Having received his diploma, he set up practice at once in New York, meeting with phenomenal success.

Why should he not? He gave his heart to his profession. The result was, he became one of the most eminent physicians in the city.

He was eighteen when he commenced his studies, and at thirty-three, by his skill, industry and science, he had made for himself a name and a fortune.



However, there was one draw-back. He had never been able to obtain Mrs. Bentley's address, and had not, therefore, been able to cancel his debt.

If Mrs. Chandler was proud of the boy of eighteen, she now gloried in the son of maturer age. He had built a magnificent town house, where they resided in winter. When summer came, Tom sent his mother to their lovely home in the town of P. Occasionally he paid her a flying visit, to see how she got along, then returned to his patients.

Strange to say, the boy who had been so fond of Mabel Lathrop, in his manhood gave small thought to love and marriage. He vowed he had not time to think of it.

His mother was more concerned than he, and often hinted she would be pleased if he would bring home a wife.

"Be patient, mother," he would answer. "I have not found the right one yet, perhaps I may some day."

Not long after their conversation, as Dr. Chandler was preparing to leave his office for the night, a man came in, apparently in great distress.

"Are you Dr. Chandler?" inquired the stranger.

"I am. What can I do for you?"

"My master is very ill, and Dr. Fulton, who has been attending him, advised him to send for you."

"Who is your master?" inquired Dr. Chandler.

"Mr. Lathrop."

"Lathrop? Lathrop? I am not acquainted with him. How far have I to go?"



"Beg pardon, sir, but I brought my master's carriage that you may the sooner get there."

In a minute more they were off.

When they arrived, John showed the doctor the way to Mr. Lathrop's apartments. As they passed through the spacious hall, the drawingroom doors being open, Dr. Chandler saw therein a very handsome woman. The lady had a book and appeared to be interestedly reading.

When they entered the sick room, Dr. Chandler shook hands in silence with his friend, Dr. Fulton, who told Leslie that this was Dr. Chandler, whom he had summoned to his assistance. Mr. Lathrop extended his thin hand to the new comer, who grasped it cordially. The warm hand-shake instantly inspired Leslie with confidence in the new doctor. The latter made his examination, asked his patient a few questions, then both physicians went out to hold a consultation.

Fifteen years had gone by since we have had a glimpse of Leslie Lathrop. The love and devotion his daughter gave him as she grew up took much of the bitterness of his life away.

Blanche had watched the growth of the love between father and daughter. She hated the child even as she had hated the mother. She seldom spoke to Pansy unless to find fault. No wonder that the child lavished all the love of her young heart upon her father.

Pansy was now eighteen. She bore a perfect



resemblance to her mother. Now in his illness, she watched over Leslie with such tenderness and care, that he became alarmed lest she should undermine her health. She had quitted the room when Dr. Fulton had called, but as soon as he went out with Dr. Chandler she was back at the bedside.

“How are you, papa?”

“Always better when you are with me, darling.”

The physicians now returned, but Pansy, thinking it was the servants she heard, remained by her father. Not until they entered did she raise her eyes to see who it was. She started shyly as if to flee.

“You need not run away,” said Dr. Fulton, smiling. “We have just come in to say good night to your father.” He turned to present Dr. Chandler. To his astonishment, the latter was standing in the middle of the room staring at Pansy, a look of bewilderment on his face.

“Struck hard at last,” he said to himself.

Dr. Chandler strove hard to regain his self-possession, but could scarcely collect himself, and he went through the introduction like one in a dream.

Whether his friend introduced Pansy as Miss or Mrs. he could not tell. All he could think of was that this girl, with the dark eyes and golden hair, was the likeness of the one he had loved in his youth, except more beautiful. This one was full of happiness and hope, with no mysteries to perplex her.



Pansy thought as the physicians went away,  
“How handsome and clever that Dr. Chandler is. I hope he can help papa get well.”

She had not noticed how the sight of her face had affected the young man, but it had not escaped the father's eyes. Ah! if he could only have known the story Dr. Chandler could tell.

As the doctors went past the drawing-room, Blanche was still sitting in the same place, apparently as interested in her book as if she were not the least bit concerned about the man lying dangerously ill up stairs.

“Lathrop's wife,” said Dr. Fulton, shrugging his shoulders.

“And the young lady in the sick room is Lathrop's daughter?” asked Dr. Chandler.

“Yes, God bless her! and never was man given a better one.”

Tom Chandler was so haunted by Pansy's sweet face he could think of little else.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### OSCAR WILDE HABERDASHER

Every day Dr. Chandler visited Mr. Lathrop, who began to mend of his illness. He met Pansy often and became hopelessly in love. He believed she was not altogether indifferent to him.

With a kindling heart he watched her administer to her father's wants.

"It is not mere physical beauty that draws me to her, but the loveliness of her noble, generous soul. Strange there should be so great a difference between mother and daughter!"

During his many visits he had never seen Blanche in the sick room.

When Leslie was so far recovered that he no longer needed a physician, Dr. Chandler still visited him. Leslie enjoyed his companionship and constantly urged him to come.

Pansy was only beginning to go into society. Her father wished to keep his treasure as long as he could, and was in no hurry to have another usurp first place in her heart. Though he guarded his treasure so jealously, still he owned that his child's life must be rather dull. He remembered



his own youth and knew that it was not in young natures to live so secluded a life.

Leslie had decided to give his darling a surprise. Two weeks before Pansy's birthday, he told Blanche she must prepare for the occasion, and send out invitations to their friends; for he had decided his daughter should have a birthday party.

Blanche opened her eyes in wonder when she heard it, but contrary to Leslie's expectations, she entered into the plan with a zest that astonished him.

"Perhaps," thought he, "she means to make amends for the past."

Among Blanche's acquaintances was a young man who had seen Pansy and who was very anxious to meet her. Blanche, too, was desirous that Pansy should cultivate his acquaintance, knowing that he was one Leslie would detest.

"How it would humble that proud man to see his adored Pansy fall in love with him. She is just old enough for such folly. If I can only bring it about!"

The birthday party would furnish the opportunity to make the young folks acquainted; for she would invite Haberdasher. So she did all she could to make it a success.

On the festal occasion, Pansy was the admired of all admirers. Mr. Haberdasher went into ecstasies over the "*bootiful cwetua*" as he called



her. He was the son of wealthy, but ignorant parents, who measured a man's worth by the length of his purse. Young Haberdasher went about with his brains in his pockets, and his head filled with nonsense. When Blanche introduced him to Pansy he was simple enough to mistake the smile that curved Pansy's lips for one of approbation and pleasure.

His little figure was arrayed in a tight-fitting suit of clothes that gave him a pinched appearance. On his pug nose rested the indispensable eye glasses. His perfumed hair was parted in the middle and brushed back from a narrow, flat forehead. On his little finger was a ring with an enormous diamond in it, while from his vest dangled a heavy watch-chain to which were attached several showy ornaments. In fact, he was gotten up without regard to expense. Why should not Pansy Lathrop smile approval?

No sooner had Blanche introduced him to her, than he began to afflict her with stilted compliments.

"Ever since the first day I beheld you, most beautiful of young ladies, I have been dying to know you. Yes! by day my thoughts were of you, and by night my dreams were only of you! I almost despaired of ever having the felicitous pleasure of your acquaintance. But at last, the longed for hour has come! Is it too much to hope, dear Miss Lathrop, that I may be permitted to worship



at your shrine? One word of encouragement from those sweet lips will transport me to the seventh heaven of delight."

Pansy's sensitive face flushed with keen disgust, his words were so superlatively silly.

"Then this is the fine gentleman my step-mother has been wishing me to know. I can read her motive," thought Pansy, as young Haberdasher was delivering his oration of conceit and foolishness into her ears.

"Poets should be answered in their own vein. I do not feel at ease, Mr. Haberdasher, in the presence of such a genius as you are. Neither can I understand how a gentleman endowed with such rare gifts of mind, can condescend to speak to so ordinary a mortal as I am."

Mockery and sarcasm were in her voice as she spoke, but the conceited fop accepted the words of seeming praise as real and his due.

"Let me teach you the language of poets, which breathes naught but love! It would make me proud to have you for a pupil. May I hope for the pleasure?"

"I do not wish to be rude, Mr. Haberdasher, but you will please excuse me. Here is papa looking for me," and she left her admirer to pour his sentiments into ears more willing to receive them. Neither did she give him a chance to speak with her again.

"I wonder why Blanche invited that soft-headed young upstart? I cannot tolerate him," said Mr.



Lathrop to his daughter when they were out of the young man's hearing. "He reminds me of an Indian chief who has donned civilian dress but can not be induced to part with his gew-gaws. He will keep his beads and feathers."

"But, papa dear, allow me to say it, Mr. Haberdasher resembles the savage only in this respect — his love of ornament. The stalwart form, the supple grace, the keenness of perception are wanting. As for me, I can liken him to nothing but an overdressed rag-doll filled with sawdust."

It was the father's turn to laugh. Pansy did not tell her father how Blanche had planned this meeting with young Haberdasher.

The birthday party, which had been a great treat for Pansy, had taken place but a few days before Leslie was taken ill. Blanche not being successful in her scheme of match-making, now stormed about Dr. Chandler's visits. Leslie approved Pansy's choice, and this was sufficient to make her opposed, and she vowed vengeance.

During his illness, Leslie had made a will in which he had given his vast fortune to his daughter. To Blanche he gave an income sufficient to maintain her, that was all. Blanche had seen the will, and it made her more bitter than ever against her husband. She had schemed to bring about a marriage between Pansy and Haberdasher, but so far she had utterly failed. Now the tables were turned upon her. Pansy had not only repulsed her advances, but had a lover of whom the father ap-



proved. This was fuel for the bad woman's jealousy, and the reason that she vowed vengeance on Pansy's innocent head.

Pansy and Dr. Chandler were betrothed, and Leslie in their happiness lived over his own, when he wooed and won his Mabel. Pansy had consented to be married in September. Scarcely a day passed during which the lovers failed to see each other. Dr. Chandler was perfectly aware of Blanche's dislike, but he was quite willing to overlook the mother's frowns so long as he could bask in the sunlight of the daughter's smiles.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### MABEL LATHROP'S RECOVERY

After Mrs. Bentley's arrival in Europe, she sought out the most renowned physicians to see what could be done for Mabel, but with all their skill they could find no way of reaching the seat of her mental difficulty. A Parisian doctor, who had acquired fame in treating brain diseases, at first gave her great encouragement, but after visiting Mabel for some time, he confessed he thought her incurable. A great London physician had also pronounced the case hopeless.

Disheartened, her soul filled with bitterness towards those whom she believed had been the cause of the affliction, Mrs. Bentley resolved to have as little to do with the world as possible. She rented a cottage at a convenient distance from London and there lived as secluded as she wished. She seldom quitted the house except on urgent business.

Mabel was kept in ignorance of the decision of the doctors. At times she grew despondent, but her mother would cheer her up and bid her hope on.

About six months after their arrival in Europe, as they were walking together in their garden, they noticed an elderly man coming towards the house.



He turned into the path which led to the kitchen, and rapped at the door. Mrs. Bentley said,

“Let us go in. He is so hideous looking Betty will be afraid.” As they went in he was asking the girl for something to eat. They noticed he spoke with a foreign accent. His apparent distress touched Mrs. Bentley and she said,

“Betty, give the poor man some breakfast. He looks both tired and hungry.”

Hearing their voices, the stranger turned and faced them. Surprise and fear were in his eyes as they rested on Mabel. The girl was busy getting something for him to eat, but he stammered out that he was not hungry, only thirsty, and started towards the door. His queer action attracted the notice of Mrs. Bentley, who saw he was a Hindoo. A suspicion flashed through her mind.

“Perhaps he is the fiend who wrought the havoc of Mabel’s mind,” she thought.

With a quick gesture she bade him stay, at the same time sending the servant out of the room. Addressing the Hindoo she said,

“You wanted something to eat. Why do you put the food aside?”

“Ladee, me not hungree,” was the reply.

“Mabel, my dear,” said her mother, “come here! Try to remember! Have you ever seen this man?”

“I do not remember him,” she answered sorrowfully. “No, mama, I cannot remember ever seeing him.”

A look of cunning was in the Hindoo’s eyes



which Mrs. Bentley was not slow to observe. It increased her suspicions.

"Dare you say you do not recognize this lady!" she said, "nor that you are not the Hindoo doctor in whose burning dwelling she was found? If you hope for mercy, tell me what infernal drug you administered to my child to paralyze her memory."

The Hindoo was as much of a coward as he was a villain. Full of superstitions, he was in mortal dread of this woman who had so truthfully accused him. He concluded to make a clean breast of his share in the work.

"Ladee," he said, his greedy soul peeping out of his small restless eyes, "me muchee poor man. You rich. You pay well, me can tell ee muchee. Ladee pay much moneys, me tell ee."

"It is he," thought Mrs. Bentley. "I was not mistaken." Turning to Mabel she said, "Perhaps you had better not listen to what he has to say, for it will be a story of wickedness."

"Oh, mama! please do not ask me to go away. I can hear nothing which will make me feel more hopeless than I do now."

"As you think best then, my dear," replied her mother.

Once more addressing Tungee she said,

"Proceed with your story and name your price for your information."

He then told all he knew of the case. His hearers listened with breathless attention, horrified at the details of the crime.



Mrs. Bentley caught at the straw of hope in Mabel's case.

"Do you mean to say you could have made the young lady all right in her mind again?"

"Do ee think Tungee fool? If me know medicine to make young ladee die and come back to life, and if me know medecine to make her forget, me know how make her remember too."

His eyes scintillated with the fire of greed as he added, "But rich ladee must pay Tungee much money if me cure."

"You deserve punishment instead, and I ought to give you up to the law; but if you will heal my daughter, I will pay you well."

Then thinking of the pain the knowledge of the past would bring to Mabel with returning memory, she half repented her compact with the Hindoo.

"Mabel," she said, "rejoiced as I should be to see you well again, you do not know the pain to be endured, when you understand the treachery and deception that have been practiced. It is so cruel that perhaps it is better you never should know."

Mabel put out her hands with a gesture of pleading.

"Oh, mamma!" she cried, "I would rather be dead than have my mind a prey to doubt. It makes me miserable! I can endure anything better than chaos."

"Well, then I have acted for the best," said Mrs. Bentley. Once more addressing Tungee she said,



"I put my daughter under your care; but beware! If you play me false, I will deliver you up to justice. The law will not show you much mercy."

Tungee winced.

"Ladee," he said, "need not pay me till young girl well; but me want little money. Tungee must get medicine."

Mrs. Bentley eyed him as if to read his soul.

"Remember you are in my power," she said.

The Hindoo grinned hideously.

"Ladee pay five hundred pound, young Ladee all well in two months."

"You deserve to be lashed rather than paid; but I will give it to you. Here are five pounds to procure the medicine. When you have cured her, you shall have the rest."

Old Tungee departed chuckling and thinking the money would be easily earned.

In a few days he commenced administering the drug which was to work such wonders. And marvelous it was, that the ailment which had baffled the most skillful physicians, now gave way to the treatment of the half-civilized Hindoo.

Mabel began to have glimpses of the past flash across her mind. Each day her memory improved, until at length she found herself perfectly well.

But strange as it was incredible, the events that had taken place in her life since her apparent death, were entirely swept out of her memory. It was



as though the faculties of the mind had been suspended and had now awakened from a profound sleep.

The Hindoo was paid his promised fee and discharged. He was also told to leave the country and never show himself again.

It was not long before Mrs. Bentley noticed that Mabel was growing gloomy. She would wander off by herself, and when she returned from the solitary walks, there were traces of tears on her pale cheeks.

“Mamma, dear, I must talk or grow deranged,” she exclaimed one day, unable to endure the thoughts that pressed upon her. “Tell me all you know about me since the time of my strange death; for it will always seem as if I have been dead. Though it kill me, I must know all.”

Seeing it was useless to longer withhold the knowledge, Mrs. Bentley replied,

“Mabel, I would have spared you the sorrow of knowing, but you must not eat your heart out in this way any longer,” and she related all of the story she knew, beginning from the time of Madgee’s visit to Tungee, and ending with the latter’s appearance at the cottage and of her cure by him.

Mabel listened without saying a word, but it was the silence of despair. Her doubts were verified by her mother’s narration.

“Mother, I can draw but one inference. I was in the way of happiness, and they chose to rid



themselves of me. Old Madgee was Blanche's attendant. I remember how strangely languid I felt after she gave me my medicine."

Reverting to another thought she asked,

"Mamma, did — did you see anything of a little child, when you went to see Leslie? Did he not tell you I left a little daughter? You look astonished. Then you never knew?"

"You left a child, Mabel? No, my dear, I did not see her, neither did he say a word about her existence."

"What have they done with my child? Oh, what have they done with her?"

"Do not grieve so, my dear. Perhaps your husband did not think to mention her. He was very embarrassed when he saw me. In fact, I did not give him a chance to say much.

"Mamma, will you please write to Leslie and ask him about my child, Pansy? He will think you heard of her when you were there."

"I will do so, immediately, my dear," responded Mrs. Bentley.

When her letter reached its destination, Leslie was absent from home, and Blanche received his mail, which she did not scruple to open if any letter aroused her curiosity. Seeing among others an envelope bearing a foreign postmark, and directed in a lady's hand, she did not hesitate, but tore it open, and eagerly perused the contents.

"So, it is from that old wretch, who caused me such a fright," was her mental comment. "She



wants to know if the little child that her daughter left is still living. I will arrange the business for you, old lady. It is lucky I got hold of this precious document. I will write to the old cat to-day, but first I will see if there are any more letters of this kind." Finding nothing to interest her, she put them on Leslie's desk.

When Blanche's reply reached Mrs. Bentley, she gave it to Mabel. Glancing at the address, Mabel saw that it was not in her husband's handwriting. With trembling fingers she opened it, and this is what she read,

"Dear Madam:

"As my husband has not time to answer your letter, he has begged me to write for him and inform you that the baby-girl, to whom your daughter gave birth, was puny and sickly and soon followed its mother to the grave.

"Yours sincerely,  
(MRS.) LESLIE LATHROP."

A look of anguish crept into Mabel's eyes as she read, and the note dropped to the floor.

"Oh, mother! read that," pointing to the letter.

Mrs. Bentley picked it up and silently obeyed. She did not attempt to offer words of consolation. She could only pray in her heart that this great blow might not kill her suffering child.

At length Mabel recovered voice.

"Mother, how could Leslie be so cruel? Had he even written one word to you, telling of baby's



death, my faith would not have been shaken; but to say he had not time to write of his own child's death, proves that he neither cared for me nor for the child. Blanche says Pansy was puny and sickly. That is not true. This was intended for your eyes, not mine. You might believe it, but I remember too well how healthy and strong the dear little one was."

"You have trusted in man and found him wanting," said Mrs. Bentley, "but there is One who never deceives. Put your trust in Him, my child, and you may yet find peace."



## CHAPTER XXX

### A SURPRISE

The time for Pansy's marriage was approaching. It was now the beginning of August, and she was to be married the latter part of September. Blanche whose great desire was to bring sorrow and shame to Leslie, puzzled her brain more than ever how to bring it about.

Dr. Chandler had told Mr. Lathrop of his cottage home in the village of P., and as he had business there, urged the latter to join him on a few days' trip to the place.

The second evening after their departure, Pansy sat at the piano playing softly to herself. Blanche was out on the lawn. Sheltered by luxuriant vines and hidden from view, she indulged her dark thoughts at pleasure. The evening was beautiful and she lingered long in her quiet bower. One by one the stars came out; but she heeded neither stars nor the passing hours. Her thoughts were of Pansy's approaching marriage, which did not please her as we know. She raved aloud in her vengeful anger.

“If I had not been a fool, I should have taken Madgee's advice and allowed her to send the child



the way the mother went. How I hate that girl! Why did I suffer her to live? If Madgee were alive, she could help me yet. Leslie Lathrop never could bring himself to love me, the daughter of John Drew, the convict. He married me that Pansy might have a kind mother."

A rustle in the vines behind her broke in upon her soliloquy, and suddenly, from his hiding place, there emerged a masked man who advanced, and bowing, mockingly, said,

"Then I have the honor of addressing Mrs. Lathrop?" Not waiting for Blanche to answer, he tore off the mask and went on in a glib voice,

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am John Drew, Jr., your estimable brother, better known as "Sharky Dandy," the notorious bank-robber, whose head brought the captor several thousand dollars." Extending his hand, "Shake, my lucky sister."

Blanche made no pretence of recognizing him. She looked longingly toward the house, as if with the intention of fleeing. Her brother observing her movement, said,

"Not so fast, my love. Why do you wish to elude me? I would follow you to the house, and I know you do not want to give me up to the authorities. What I have just heard from those pretty lips would make a nasty job for you if I chose to disclose it. You are in my power, little sister," and he grinned sardonically.

"Let us come to an understanding. From what



I overheard a minute ago, I see you are not on the best of terms with your husband and his child. I learned a few days ago that Leslie Lathrop is the man I have been searching for, these nineteen years. I have a bone to pick with him. I came here to-night with the intention of examining his premises, to find out the by-ways of the house. Yesterday I heard he had left town. When he returns, I am to come with two of my best men to rob him and take him off a prisoner to keep company with his worthy father-in-law. I thought Mabel still alive, until I heard you say that you had got rid of her, so she is out of the case. Now, since *you* are his wife, I may change my programme. Ha, ha! How would *he* like to know he has married my sister? Capital! But let us understand each other. I have heard enough to convince me that you are not the happiest woman in the world. Let us join forces and pay that man the debts we owe him."

When Sharky Dandy first appeared, Blanche was frightened; but as he explained who he was and that he, too, had a grudge against Leslie, she began to think he might be useful to her.

A diabolical idea entered her head. She felt that she had found her match in wickedness, an accomplice who would not scruple to perform any act. She knew, too, that she was in his power. She felt angry with herself for the rash words she had spoken.

"I must conciliate the wretch," she thought.



She seated herself once more, her brother sitting down near her. She shrank from him, which he noticed and resented.

“You needn’t be so confounded afraid of touching me! Fine clothes sometimes hide as bad a heart as slouchy garments. I have committed many robberies, but, as yet, have never murdered.”

This bomb-shell directed at Blanche made her wince. She pretended to ignore his remark, but by the light of his dark lantern, Sharky saw that her face was livid.

“That was a good hit,” he thought.

“You speak of having a grudge against my husband,” said Blanche. “What harm has he ever done to you?”

“Harm! He has done an injury I shall never forgive! He stole from me the girl I meant to marry.

“What!” exclaimed Blanche, “do you mean to tell me that the meek, pretty girl Leslie married was once your sweetheart?”

“Well, she wasn’t exactly that, but I meant to make her mine just the same. I had things all arranged to secure the girl, when that precious husband of yours made his appearance and carried my prize off, while I lay wounded and suffering from the ball which should have gone through his heart.”

“Quite a romance,” sneered Blanche. “Tell me all about that love affair and perhaps I can show you a way that will wound him, stab him



through the heart a thousand times more fatally than bullet or steel."

"By Jove! you are a trump, and a true scion of our house. 'Blood is thicker than water.'"

If the fire that scintillated from Blanche's eyes as she heard this could have killed, he would have fallen dead at her feet.

"But now to business," continued Sharky. He proceeded to tell her what we already know of his love for Mabel Lestrangle.

"And now," he went on, "I suppose you would like to know how it is that after being dead and planted, I am back here. You see, my roving spirit couldn't rest away from old New York. I thought business must be dull without me."

"Stop that nonsense!" interrupted Blanche, "and make yourself clear. I heard all about Sharky Dandy, but never dreamed it was you. You got left though, by Mabel and her father."

"Yes, but I've partly paid the old scamp, and I've come back to balance accounts. I thought that as he is the only one about who knows me personally, it wouldn't be safe for me to let him be loose; so I've trapped the old man again. He will have quite a board bill to pay before he leaves me this time. But to return to my resurrection — When I left here, the time that old Lestrangle and his girl ran away from the cave, my purse was getting pretty thin. Soon after, I saw a chance of making a few dollars. You remember the big reward that was offered for my apprehension?



‘Well,’ I said, ‘now Sharky, if you were but clever, there would be two chances for you — one of getting the money, and the other of baffling those detectives who ache to get hold of you.’ As luck would have it, not long after, I was rambling over one of those wild ranches in the West, and didn’t I stumble upon a cove lying stark dead with a bullet hole through him, and the best of it was, he resembled me very much, so I called out, ‘Hello, Sharky, is that you there?’ ”

“Oh, nonsense!” again spoke Blanche. “Why don’t you stop fooling?”

“Well, I am getting at it, dear. I said to myself, ‘Sharky, old boy, here’s the chance,’ and to the fellow, ‘How’ll you swap clothes?’ No answer. And as silence means consent, I had on the cowboy’s outfit in a jiffy, and he was togged out in mine. With my artistic skill I made the necessary changes in my countenance and became the identical lariat thrower. Joking aside, I thought the big cow-hide boots were going to pull my legs off. But I said, ‘Never mind, Sharky, you can afford to drag them along a while, since the job will pay you.’ So putting the new Sharky on the mustang, I rode into the town of Silver Hollow, where an inquest was held and where I told the story I did when I brought him here. I thought those old greasers were going to shake my hands off, I was so popular for the wonderful feat I had accomplished. The best joke of all was to have old Lestrangle identify me, and



then have them shell out the money. The pot has kept me feasting royally until now."

"It was ridiculous enough," remarked Blanche. "Then you have Mr. Lestrangle prisoner again? How did you make out to get him?"

"It was easy enough. I thought the old man needed a little sand, for being foolish enough to go back to his old haunt, so I let him have a bagful. Do you understand?"

"Ah! that accounts for the disappearance," said Blanche. "But how dare you roam about in this fashion?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed he, "I have plenty of disguises. I can walk arm in arm, in broad daylight, with the sharpest of detectives. Only day before yesterday I was an innocent looking old man from the country, who called at the chief of police's office to give information. It did one good to see how easily Smarty took the bait from the yarn I spun — but, let's speak of your husband — I meant to pay him for the nice trick he played me; but now, this unexpected meeting with you alters my plans."

"You are a clever villain," said Blanche. "What a pity you did not come to me when Leslie first brought his wife here, it might have saved —" She stopped short.

"Spit it out!" said Sharky, "or I will. It might have saved you from — m-u-r-d-e-r!"

The moon had now risen and by its light he saw the angry glitter of Blanche's eyes.



“How dare you accuse me of murder? I tell you I never harmed even a hair of her head.”

“No,” he said, grinning, “but you allowed another to do the job for you. Your own words confess it.”

“Enough of this!” she cried. “If you wish me to help you, you must never say the word again! You must forget what you have heard.”

“I will try.” But his tone belied his promise. “Now tell me your plan by which I can get even with — Leslie Lathrop. By the way, sister dear, don’t you believe there is a drop or two of Indian blood in our veins, the love of revenge is so sweet to us?”

“I believe you were intended for a clown, you are so absurdly witty; but you have spoiled your calling by becoming an outlaw robber.”

“Which is a thousand times better than being a mur — Don’t throw any shafts at me lest I hurl them back with double force. Since you live in a glass house, don’t throw stones, remember! Now for your scheme.”

Blanche hesitated. Why should she? The plan she had formed would serve her purpose as well as his.

“Swear to me, then, that whatever happens, you will never disclose my share of the plot.”

“Show me a way by which I may be revenged, and I swear by Heaven that your secret shall be safe with me. No earthly power can tear it from me!”



"You do not know, perhaps, that Mabel left a daughter, who is now eighteen years old. Leslie loves her almost as fondly as he did the girl he stole from you."

"Confound him!" cried Sharky, "but go on, what about the girl?"

"She is engaged to be married to the famous Dr. Chandler of this city. The marriage is to take place the latter part of next month. I wish to prevent it. This is my plan: Suppose you dress as some fine gentleman. Thursday is one of my reception days. You will come as my guest, and I will introduce you as a wealthy Englishman. Try to appear in character. I will present you to Pansy, Leslie's daughter. Let me warn you. The girl abhors foppishness. I want you to make a favorable impression. Your appearance must be that of an unassuming gentleman. Are you equal to the part?"

"You shall see. Proceed with the unfolding of your plan," he said.

"When you have called a few times," she went on, "I propose that you carry off the girl, hide her somewhere, and I will have it appear that she has eloped with you. It will be given out that you are an adventurer, which will break her father's heart. Do your prettiest, and trust to me to drive home the dagger. I will make known to him who you are, which will be the poison to slay Leslie's peace."

"By all the jumping stars!" ejaculated Sharky.



“They say ‘trust a woman for devising a plan.’ I have a notion that fine grained gentleman will suffer; but it will serve him right! ‘You steal my dog and I’ll steal you cat.’”

“You are horribly vulgar,” said Blanche impatiently. “You must drop your slangy phrases if you want to enter my parlors.”

“Sister mine, you have seen only the coarse outer bark. When next you behold me, I shall have changed my rough exterior and become a finely polished gentleman, that is, if you will furnish the means. My funds are low just now.” Blanche sneered,

“I expected you would plead poverty. Here, take this,” taking from her purse a handful of bank-notes; “but remember, this is all you will get.”

“Quite enough for the present,” coolly remarked Sharky. “One question, sister mine. What has the girl done that you hate her so bitterly?”

“What has she done! Leslie has made a will wherein he leaves to me what the law obliges, and gives the precious daughter all the rest.”

“Well, you need have no further anxieties. I will see the young lady safely out of your way. We are in the same boat and sailing for the same point. I will take the hateful young miss to my headquarters. Once there, you will be as free from her as though she were dead. One thing you must promise. I make a great deal of money



by my profession, yet it slips away even more easily than it comes. When you have succeeded in securing your husband's property, promise to settle a handsome sum on me, say three thousand a year."

Blanche gave a start. The audacity of Sharky's demand surprised her; but instantly she recovered her composure. Her husband was young and likely to live many years.

"By that time," she thought, "I will find some way to rid myself of my brother's oppression." She said, "You are modest in your request. Why do you not ask for the whole of my husband's fortune?"

"Well, if it is not enough, I am not so modest as to refuse more."

"I accede to your demand."

"That's a confounded good plan of yours, Blanche. What I had thought to do was but a mole hill in comparison."

"As we understand each other, I will return to the house now," said Blanche, rising. "Remember, Thursday evening!"

"You have not given me a name yet. Who shall I be?" demanded Sharky Dandy.

Blanche paused a moment.

"I have it! You are Mr. Henry Holmes. Good night, Mr. Holmes, I must be gone."

Sharky Dandy bowed low.

"Good bye, Mrs. Lathrop. I am sorry to have to be deprived so soon of your adorable company." And so the schemers parted.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### MR. HENRY HOLMES

As Blanche sat among her guests, a servant ushered a handsome, well dressed gentleman into the parlor. She caught her breath as the new comer approached. Was this fine looking man her infamous brother? He carried himself with the grace of a prince.

"He will do," she said under her breath.

"I am happy to meet you once more, Mr. Holmes."

Mr. Holmes bowed low, and answered her in a few well chosen words. Then Blanche introduced him to her company as a friend she had met in England. Pansy was the last to whom the new comer was presented.

When he beheld the beautiful girl, so like the woman he had worshiped in his reckless fashion, it shook his composure, but instantly he regained his self possession, while a strange light came in his eyes as he remarked,

"I am more than pleased to meet you, Miss Lathrop."

Pansy bowed, as she owned to herself that he was a distinguished looking man.



"I put Mr. Holmes in your care. As he is a stranger, see he does not suffer from ennui," said Blanche.

Mr. Holmes endeavoured to interest Pansy by giving her glowing descriptions of foreign travels.

Pansy felt an intuitive repulsion and shrank from him. Soon as she could do so with politeness she withdrew from his company.

When it came time for the guests to depart, Sharky Dandy managed to whisper in Blanche's ear,

"The coast is clear. That girl will fall into the snare easily. We have but to play our cards well."

When Leslie and Tom Chandler returned from their trip, Sharky adroitly kept out of their company, and, as Mr. Lathrop scarcely ever joined the visitors in the drawing room, they rarely met. Sharky need have had no fear of being recognized, his disguise was so complete.

It was laughable to see how well Blanche and her brother succeeded in hoodwinking Mrs. Lathrop's fashionable friends. Mr. Holmes became the lion of the day. He was courted and fêted, after the manner of worldly people.

Some time after the notorious robber had become a frequent visitor at the Lathrop mansion, Blanche saw that Pansy avoided him. The worthy step-mother took her to task for it.

"Pansy," she said, "why are you so obstinate? Why do you treat Mr. Holmes with so much cold-



ness? Are you so simple as not to see that all the young ladies who visit us would be delighted to receive half the attention from that gentleman that you do. Put a little sense into your head! Throw aside your silly infatuation for that love-sick Dr. Chandler and think of the honors that would await you, should you be fortunate enough to win the affection of such a man as Mr. Holmes."

Pansy, who had listened to this harangue with indignation, then remarked,

"What new freak is this of yours, mamma? I cannot understand the sudden interest you take in my welfare. If you wish me to do right, how can you advise me to do so heartless a thing; when the preparations for my marriage are even now going on? You can never make me like your English friend. He repels me. Never speak of him to me again! I dislike him!"

The designing woman's mocking laugh echoed through the room.

"Why these mock heroics? You would do for a heroine in a dime novel!"

Blanche spoke in accents that sent a chill through Pansy's frame.

"Remember, you haughty simpleton," she said, "you have disregarded my wish in this matter, but you are not yet married to that upstart doctor."

Blanche had said enough to make Pansy feel uneasy, yet the feeling was but momentary.

"Mamma is angry because I prefer Tom to the



rich Mr. Holmes. Perhaps after all she means it for my good; but I would prefer a life in an attic with Tom, than one in a palace with Mr. Holmes."

Just then she heard the sound of carriage wheels. She looked out. It was Dr. Chandler who had called to take her out for a drive.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### A CRUEL BLOW

If one had entered Blanche's private room during the early hours of the day, ever since her meeting with her brother, he would have found her busily engaged in studying Pansy's peculiar style of penmanship. She could very soon imitate it so perfectly that an expert would have sworn that the words she traced on the delicate paper were written by Pansy.

"It will do," commented Blanche, surveying her successful work. "The snare is all set ready for the unsuspecting bird. Ah, my pretty one! We'll see what your adoring swain can do to release you, when you fall into the fangs of the Shark. To-morrow night brings the crisis."

This was Tuesday and Thursday was Pansy's wedding day. Great preparations had been made for the marriage, and many invitations sent out.

A grand trousseau had been procured for the happy bride, and no pains had been spared to make the occasion a pleasant one.

Wednesday, Dr. Chandler called to see Pansy, but did not remain long. As he bade her good-night, he said,



"To-morrow is our wedding day, and then I shall have you always. God bless you, darling!" He strained her to his heart, unconscious of the gleaming eyes watching them.

"That is your long good bye. You will not find your bride! The marriage bells will be changed to tones as doleful as a funeral knell. To-morrow will be a day of triumph for me. The hardest task is to be performed to-night. My brother will soon be here."

After parting with Tom, Pansy ran up stairs to her own little parlor, where the four young ladies who were to act as bride's maids were waiting for her.

"Come," they said, as she entered the room, "we have been examining your wedding gown and we are dying to see how lovely you will look in it. Do try it on!"

"To-morrow will be soon enough," answered Pansy, laughing.

"It is too long to wait, and we must see you to-night!" cried out the young ladies in a chorus.

"Since you are determined, I suppose I shall have to obey."

Soon Pansy was enveloped in its shining folds of white satin.

"Bring the veil and the orange blossoms, Alice," said one of the girls, "let us complete the radiant angel."

"Oh!" exclaimed Pansy, half in earnest, half in jest, "I am not superstitious, but you know



they say that trying on the whole bridal array brings bad luck to the bride."

"Nonsense!" laughed they. "Away with signs! You are not one to give them credit."

Pansy did not wish to be ridiculed, so she laughed and said, "Bring them then!"

So the costly veil and wreath were adjusted and the lovely picture was complete.

"You are so beautiful! Pansy," said Alice. "It is no wonder Dr. Chandler surrendered!"

"You little goose!" laughed Pansy. Then a grave look came to her face as she thought of her father. "I wonder what papa will think of my dress? I have not kissed him good night, and I will run down and let him see me in it." She softly opened the library door and peeped in. Her father was sitting by his table, and to her surprise, Blanche was in the room. She glided in, smiling and saying,

"The girls persuaded me to try on this dress, and I want you to see it, and to tell me how I look." There was admiration and love in the father's face as he answered,

"You are very beautiful, my darling child. I never saw so fair a picture but once before in my life."

Blanche's eyes gleamed with a baleful fire, but neither father nor daughter observed it. Pansy bade her father an affectionate good night, then turned to Blanche,

"Have you no word of congratulation to offer,



mamma? Will you not kiss me, too?" she asked, approaching to receive the caress, but the hard tones of her step-mother checked her.

"Do not come near me with your soft nonsense! Your father has already made you vain and silly enough."

Poor Pansy retreated to her room in tears. Blanche did not tarry long in the library after Pansy had left it. She went straight to her own apartments, locking her door carefully after her.

"Now for the completion of my work," said she. She unlocked her desk and drew from its interior an envelope. Breaking the seal, she took out a neatly written note. A look of satisfaction came to her face as she carefully read its contents. Then taking her pen, she added a post-script, and selecting a fresh envelope, placed the note within, carefully sealing and addressing it. When all was done, she placed it in the bosom of her dress.

When quite sure that all the inmates of the house were asleep, she opened her door softly, pausing a moment on the threshold. She cast a searching glance along the corridor. Silence reigned throughout the house.

"Every one must be sound asleep, I think it is safe to venture." Cautiously she crept along the carpeted hall, halting a moment at the door of Leslie's room. All was silent within. She did not proceed any farther up the hall, but retraced her steps past her own apartments to Pansy's, which were near the landing of the stairs. She could



detect the sound of regular and easy breathing. Waiting a moment longer, she slowly turned the knob of the door and pushed it ajar. Pansy scarcely ever locked her door.

The moonlight striking her peaceful face, showed Blanche that her victim was sound asleep. With a quick, noiseless step, she approached the sleeping girl, clapping a chloroformed sponge to her nostrils. When fully satisfied that the drug had done its work, she dressed Pansy in her traveling suit, placed her wallet, watch, a few trinkets and some wearing apparel in a portmanteau and then slipped out and descended to meet her confederate, who was waiting for her at the side door entrance.

"All is ready, follow me and be cautious," said Blanche.

"No need to tell a thief to be cautious," Sharky whispered back, silently following her lead. Blanche hastily fastened a hat and cloak on Pansy, then went to the door, peered into the hall and motioned to her brother.

Sharky Dandy took the slight form in his arms and was soon in the open air. Luck seems to favor the wicked and so far they had not been seen.

Sharky was met by a man of his choosing, who took the burden from his arms and conveyed it to the carriage in which a third person sat waiting. Blanche now handed the satchel to Sharky saying,

"I wish you good luck with the runaway bride."



Then shutting the door, she went to the library, placed the letter on the table, where it could not fail to attract Leslie's notice, and then retired to her room, satisfied that her fiendish work was accomplished.

When Leslie reached the breakfast room next morning, Blanche and the four young ladies were already there. Pansy not appearing, Leslie became uneasy.

"I wonder what keeps Pansy? It is not like her to be late," he said.

Blanche pretended to be much annoyed over her thoughtlessness.

"I will go and see," spoke up one of the young ladies. She soon returned looking perplexed. "I do not know where Pansy can be. She is not in her room, nor anywhere in the house."

"Well," said Blanche, "she cannot be lost. There is no use waiting breakfast any longer. Pansy knows the way to the dining room." And she proceeded to pour the coffee.

By the time breakfast was over Leslie had become really uneasy.

"What can keep the child away? I am surprised at her delay."

"Perhaps she went out for a walk," suggested Miss Norman. "Let us all look for her."

Blanche joined in the search. After they had sought for her everywhere, Leslie went to the library, thinking she had gone there. Here, he caught sight of the letter, addressed to him in her



hand-writing. He snatched it up in anxious haste.

"What has she to say that she must needs write?" He tore the envelope open and glanced over the contents.

"My child! my child!" he cried. "It cannot — it must not be true. How could my Pansy be so misguided!"

He buried his face in his hands in the abandonment of grief. At last, the thought that this was to have been his child's wedding day and that another besides himself was to be smitten with shame and grief partially aroused him. He rang the bell for Blanche.

"Your wish has come to pass, and I am stabbed to the heart. Read this!" handing her the note.

She did as he bade her, and there was not the least show of guilt in her face as she did so. "I thought the silly child was in love with Mr. Holmes. I never suspected she would carry the flirtation so far. I must break the news to our guests that the wedding is postponed. Send for Dr. Chandler and tell him of his loss yourself." She closed the door and was gone, while Leslie wrote a different note, summoning the defrauded bridegroom.

Tom Chandler made haste to answer it in person, a great fear numbing his senses.

"What has happened?" cried he.

"Read for yourself," said Leslie, handing him the forged letter.



This is what it contained,

“Dear papa:

“It pains me to have to write this to you, and I am so sorry to cause you grief. You have always been so good to me. But, papa, do not judge me too severely. I did not know my own heart when I promised to become Dr. Chandler’s wife. It was a mistake. I never loved him, and marriage with him would only be another wrong. I am going away with the only man I can ever love.

“Since the first time I met Mr. Holmes, I have seen how utterly impossible it was for me to marry Dr. Chandler. I am very sorry for him. He is so good. Tell him, papa, had it been possible I would have spared him this pain and disappointment.

“Good bye, dear papa, and forgive me!

“Your PANSY.”

Dr. Chandler was stunned by the sudden blow. As he recovered somewhat, he refused to credit the crushing news.

“I will not believe it! Pansy, my innocent promised wife, go away with that villain! Some evil agency has been at work. She has not acted thus of her own free will.”

“Neither can I believe she has,” said the unhappy father.

“I know not by what infernal means he has won her to go with him; but it has been devil’s work, or my name is not Tom Chandler! That Holmes will bear watching.”

As Leslie thought the same, he put the matter



into the hands of a detective, with instructions to follow the pair, and if necessary rescue the bride.

Dr. Chandler packed a few things in a traveling bag and started for his summer home among the mountains, feeling the need of solitude and rest.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### SHARKY DANDY'S RUSE

After Pansy's capture, the carriage was driven off at a rapid pace to a not very respectable part of the city. Here Sharky completed his arrangements. He was shrewd as he was cunning. Everything was in readiness.

When he arrived at the depot next morning and purchased three tickets for Ogdensburg, and paid the charges to have the body of his dead wife taken on the same train, no one mistrusted anything wrong. The husband bowed down with grief and the aged father and mother accompanying him were Sharky Dandy and his accomplices.

Sharky breathed more freely when the train was in motion. He had given Pansy a sleeping potion before she was fairly awakened from the effects of the first drug, something that would bind her senses in slumber, till he could administer more, if needed. Holes had been punctured in the coffin in which she was confined, so as to prevent suffocation.

At last their destination was reached. The purchasing of tickets to Ogdensburg had been a ruse



on the part of Sharky to throw detectives off the scent, should any get on his track.

At the village of L—— he and his accomplices got off the train with the coffin. He hired a wagon and drove away in the thick darkness unobserved.

They drove in an opposite direction from that in which they intended going, meaning to return on their tracks by another route.

They succeeded in reaching the lonely road, but not a bit too soon. Sharky thought he heard a slight noise proceeding from the coffin. The wagon was stopped, and he opened the lid, that more air might get to the girl. When they had nearly reached the place sought, Sharky and one of his companions lifted the coffin out, and the other returned to the village with the wagon.

As the two men were trudging along with their burden, once more Sharky heard Pansy groan.

"Hurry along!" said Sharky. So they moved more rapidly.

When at last they reached the robbers' cave, the girl was conscious. They were admitted by Meg, the queer old woman, whose appearance had but slightly changed during the lapse of years. They carried Pansy to the room prepared for her reception.

"Do all you can to revive the young lady!" commanded Sharky.

The crone hobbled away and soon returned with a bowl of broth. Though now awakened, Pansy was stupid from the effects of the opiate. She



could not collect her thoughts. The broth imparted a little strength.

"Where am I?" asked she in a drowsy voice.

"Among friends, Miss Lathrop."

"Ah, it is you, Mr. Holmes." Looking about in a dazed way at her surroundings, the rough looking men, and at the repulsive old woman, she asked,

"How came I here, Mr. Holmes?"

"Miss Lathrop, you are too tired to listen. Rest to-night! To-morrow I will tell you all about it." Once more addressing Meg, he said,

"Help the young lady to bed, watch with her, and whenever she awakes, give her some nourishment!"

Then motioning the two men to follow him, they left the room.

After doing as she was bid, Meg curled herself up in a big chair, prepared to doze while the young lady slept. But sleep did not come soon. She chuckled to herself as she thought,

"The pretty bird has fallen into a nice nest of hawks. I wonder if our Dandy intended her for his bride? It is near a score of years since he told me he was going to bring home a wife. That one escaped, but this one won't ever get away." The hag grinned, revealing a double row of long yellow tushes, over which projected her sharp, beaked nose.

Pansy was already soundly sleeping. When she awoke, she had quite recovered from the effects of



the drug. Young and strong, it had little effect upon her. She sat up in bed and looked about. By the light of the lamp, she saw the apartment was well furnished, but was gloomy. She had an uncomfortable feeling that something was wrong. Old Meg observing her movements, approached.

"How do ye feel this mornin'?" she asked.

"One of Satan's imps," thought Pansy, as the crone came into view, though she answered composedly enough, "Soundly, thank you. Tell me, please, where I am and how I came here."

"It is for my master to tell you. My orders are to wait on you and keep my mouth shut about what ain't my business."

Pansy now sprang out of bed; and, though weak, refused all assistance, and hurriedly put on her garments. Meg then went to the door, took a key from her pocket, unlocked it, and passed out, fastening the door after her.

"I see I am a prisoner with that wicked looking creature for a keeper — What does it mean?" She wrung her hands, crying piteously.

"I saw Mr. Holmes here," she continued. "I know he is at the bottom of this."

By this time Meg returned, bearing a tray containing Pansy's breakfast.

"Mr. Holmes sends his compliments and says he will call on you after you have eaten."

Though Pansy felt the need of food, she ate but very little. However, she drank her coffee and felt better.



As soon as Pansy had finished her breakfast, Meg placed the dishes back on the tray and again went away. In a few minutes, Pansy heard a knock on the door, then the key turned in the lock and Mr. Holmes stood before her.

"May I come in?" he asked.

Pansy detected a tone of mockery in his voice. The hot blood rushed to her temples, then receded, leaving her pale as death; but she firmly replied,

"I am to have little choice in the matter, since you have already entered. It is not the custom of the jailer to crave admittance of his prisoner."

"By the jumping stars! She is made of harder metal than I supposed. She may give me more trouble than I expected," thought Sharky, as he advanced boldly, and took a seat near her.

"I presume you would like to know how it is that you are here?"

Pansy's eyes flashed as she replied,

"I should certainly like to know why you brought me here."

"Have patience and I will tell you. Loving you as I do, I could not see you sacrifice yourself for a stupid man like Dr. Chandler, who does not care for you. Promise to marry me, who loves you in one day more than Dr. Chandler can in a life time. Do so, and we will go to my English home, where we will be happy."

"Cease your perfidious language! How dare you slander Dr. Chandler, and in the same breath speak of love to me? Never will I believe he does



not care for me, unless he, himself, tells me so. Begone! I will not listen to you, Mr. Holmes!"

"I thought you would not be easily convinced of his falseness; so I have brought a proof of his loyalty to you." Sharky produced a piece of paper from his inside coat-pocket.

"See for yourself!" he said.

Pansy took the note and, as she read, she thought, "It is Tom's hand-writing, but it is not like him."

These were the words:

"Friend Holmes:

"I have tried to steel myself for the ordeal and make my promise true, but find that my courage fails me. I must not lead Miss Lathrop to the altar knowing my love is given to another.

"Money is tempting, but love has conquered, and I relinquish the heiress to you. I tell you this knowing that you are sincere in your affection for Miss Lathrop. Try and win her. She is worthy of any man's love. I am unworthy of her.

"Your friend,

"TOM CHANDLER."

Instead of giving way to grief as Sharky had supposed she would do, Pansy threw the letter on the floor and stamped on it.

"It is a villainous forgery! Tom Chandler never wrote it. Go! Your wife! You were mistaken when you thought to catch me in your snare. You are a wolf in sheep's clothing — leave me, I say!"



Sharky, seeing that nothing could be gained by coaxing, now had recourse to threats.

"Since you seem to know me so well, I will not plead innocence. You will do well to consider the advantage of the offer I have made you. You cannot escape me, for you are safely hid in this cave. No one will think of searching for you. It has been two nights and a day since you left your home in New York. Good bye, my beauty. I give you three days to think the matter over. No doubt you will have sense enough to prefer a life of ease and luxury as my wife, to one of misery dragged out in this dismal prison." And Pansy was left alone.

"Oh! what will become of me? A prisoner in the hands of a villain! Two nights and a day! Yesterday was to be my bridal day, and I knew nothing! Poor papa, and Tom! What can they think has become of me?"

Three days later, Sharky sent Meg to announce his return and that he wished to see her.

"Tell your master," said Pansy, "that he need not trouble himself about coming. Say to him that my mind has not changed!"

"Curse her!" roared Sharky Dandy, when Meg told him what Pansy had said. "I will curb that proud heart yet." Not heeding her words, he rushed past Meg to the prisoner's room. He pretended not to notice her aversion to him.

"Well, my dear, what answer have you for me? Your days of grace are over."



“Did not my *keeper* tell you my answer? If not, I will repeat it. I have fully considered your base proposal. None but a coward would hold a defenseless girl a prisoner. I hate you! I never will be your wife! Now leave me!”

Sharky could not but admire her courage and spirited beauty.

“She has the grit of her grandfather,” he thought. Persuasion was out of the question. He would have to use force.

“Not so fast, my pretty,” he said. “Your confinement has not improved your temper. *My wife* you *shall* be, and sooner than you expect. One week from to-day and you will be my very own. You have had your say, let me have mine. I would like better to have you marry me willingly, but you choose force. Dr. Chandler is out of your life; for supposing you are ever again free, he would shrink from contracting an alliance with a girl whose conduct is so severely criticised in the newspapers. Would you like to know what they say about you?”

Grinning hatefully, he drew a paper from his pocket and read these cruel words,

#### SCANDAL IN HIGH LIFE

“A young lady of high social standing in this city, whose name, in consideration of her afflicted parents, we will suppress, left her home on the eve of her wedding day with an adventurer, who, disguised as a wealthy Englishman, had been a frequent visitor



at her home. It is not known where the eloping couple went."

"*That's* your work!" cried the frantic girl.

"Not mine alone. I had help from your affectionate step-mother. As you and I are to be partners hereafter, you ought to be better acquainted with me. Let me give you a short account of myself," and he told his story in brief and brutal words.

"Does the revelation surprise you? Quite a come-down, eh? Now don't you see I am irresistible?"

A groan of despair burst from Pansy when she saw the sort of creature she had to deal with. She implored him for mercy.

"Restore me to my father and you shall have my eternal gratitude! I will pray for you every day."

"Never mind, my girl," he said interrupting her, "I care not for your prayers. What can prayers do for such as me? No! I vowed vengeance on your father. I have waited long, but the chance has come and my revenge is sweet. How he will writhe when my sister tells him that his Pansy is the bride of Sharky Dandy! How much worse than for her to be the wife of Holmes, the adventurer! 'Every dog has his day,' and mine has come at last."

"I have begged of you to release me and you refuse. There is One who watches over and pro-



fects the innocent. He who sees your inhuman conduct will not abandon me to the misery of a life with you. Remember! there will come a day of reckoning, and perhaps it will come sooner than you expect."

"Quite a sermon, little girl, but it is wasted on me! Now, good-night to you. Remember our wedding day! The minister is already engaged and the grub is ordered for the feast."



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### PANSY MAKES A DISCOVERY

Left alone, Pansy wept as though her heart would break. Sharky's intention of making her his wife was the greatest terror of all.

"If I could only escape!" was her constant cry.

Sharky had brought her mother years ago to the same room in which Pansy was now a prisoner.

As she bewailed her hard fate, she heard a faint moan, apparently from the bowels of the earth. She looked anxiously about, even moved out the heavy bedstead from the corner and discovered the hole in the wall, and felt the air rushing through.

Though shaking with fear, she crawled through the aperture. With lamp in hand, she proceeded to examine the stone corridor and two rooms. The third one had an occupant, an old man, with snowy beard and emaciated features. He was lying on a little couch. When Pansy came near, to her utter amazement she recognized her grand-father Lestrangle.

A low cry escaped her lips. "Grandpapa," she whispered.



He gazed in bewilderment, then seeing who it was, exclaimed,

“My little Pansy here! What does it mean, child?”

Then Pansy told her sad tale, ending with Sharky’s threat of a forced marriage.

“Monster!” cried Mr. Lestrangle excitedly. “If I could only lay hands on him! But there is not much hope of getting out of these,” pointing to the shackles on his feet. “I was at my old home among the mountains, where they sand-bagged me. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in this place, for the second time in my life.”

“You must return to your room now, and cover all traces of your visit here.”

“Do not worry, grandpapa, I will be very careful. I will come again to-morrow night. Try to think of a plan whereby we can get away. We must defeat the villain!”

The next evening, after she had been locked in for the night, she again sought her grandfather.

“Back again,” she said. “The shark is not half as sharp as he thinks himself. Have you thought how we can escape him?”

“No, dear child, I have not hit upon any plan. My anxiety is for you. It does not matter much for me. The most of my mature life has been a bitter mistake and disappointment, its deepest grief, the fact that I have caused one dear to me great suffering.”



"Dear grandpapa," said Pansy, "will you not tell about that past, on which you seem to dwell with so much sorrow. It will ease your heart."

"Child, you know not what you are asking. I never told your own mother even, because I feared she would lose her affection for me. No, dear, it is better you should not know. I do not want my Mabel's child to hate me."

"Grandpapa, I can not believe you have been very bad. I will love you none the less, if you take me into your confidence. It will bring us two poor troubled ones the closer together."

"It would be a relief to confide in you what I have guarded so long. Even more than did your own dear lost mother, you resemble your grand mother. I will tell you the story."

"When your mother was a little child and my home a paradise, a serpent in human form glided into it, poisoning its happiness, and arousing the demon of jealousy. My wife was pure and beautiful. I loved her as a strong nature loves. I would have staked my life on her virtuous character. Imagine my horror and wrath when after several hateful hints regarding her, the venomous tongued enemy planned to have me witness a scene which caused my blood to boil in my veins. My hot, fierce temper rose up, but, thank Heaven! I did not lose my reason and become a murderer!

"I remember the evening as if it were but yesterday. I had left my office and had nearly reached home when my false friend overtook me,



and seizing me by the arm said, 'Come with me! It is time your eyes were opened. Come and see for yourself!'

"He hung to me like the viper he was. When we had reached the lawn, surrounding my home, he halted in the shadow of a large tree and pointed toward the summer-house. There was my wife, your grandmother, in close conversation with a gentleman.

" 'I told you so,' whispered the fiend. I thought I should go mad. As if to crown the summit of my shame and sorrow, my wife and her companion rose from their seats. I saw her throw her arms about the gentleman's neck and kiss him affectionately.

"Like a mad-man I tore myself from the grasp of my enemy and fled from the scene. When at last I went home, I saw my Mabel kneeling by the cot of our little daughter, her face raised to Heaven in earnest supplication. Able to pray when she had so wronged me! It was more than I could bear. In a frenzy, I rushed into the room. 'Traitor!' perfidious woman! How dare you kneel there and pray when you are as false as hell!'

"By this time she had risen to her feet and was looking at me in a bewildered way.

" 'Why, Henry, what ails you? Are you ill? How strangely you speak! I came into baby's room to wait for you.'

"Her calmness angered me still more. 'Your



acting is very good,' I said, with bitter sarcasm, 'so good, that had I not been a witness to your baseness I might still believe in you. Thank Heaven! my eyes are opened.'

" 'What do you mean?' asked my wife.

" 'Woman,' I gasped, 'are you so lost to shame and honor that you dare, in the face of what I have seen, pretend innocence? I witnessed your parting with that wretch, who has robbed you of virtue and me of peace!'

" The color fled from her face. Shall I ever forget its agony, as she threw herself at my feet, taking my hands in hers and begged me not to be so harsh in my judgment and she would explain all. I, brute that I was, spurned her from me. 'Go!' I said, 'You are looking your last on me and our child. You are no fit mother for my daughter. To-morrow we go from you forever.'

" She saw there was no mercy, nothing but fierce determination. She arose from her kneeling posture, and her manner changed to proud scorn.

" 'You refuse to listen to me. The day will come when you will regret bitterly having condemned me unheard. I can never forgive nor forget your cruel and unjust words. They are burned in my heart.'

" The next day I arranged with my lawyer, leaving a great share of my property to my wife, who was also an heiress in her own right. I left town with my little daughter and her nurse, Mrs. Grant.



“What my much wronged wife suffered when her infant child was torn from her, God and herself alone know. From that day, I have never seen her.”

“Poor grandfather, poor grandmother. She was innocent; but how did you find it out?”

“I told you I left home the day after my stormy interview with my wife. I came to these wild mountains, and determined to hide myself from the world; for my pride had received a mortal wound. I found a little cottage which, being isolated from other habitations, I purchased.

“Despite my jealousy and anger, I still loved my wife. I seemed to hear her suing for mercy and pardon. In my feverish dreams, her eyes haunted me with their sorrowful, reproachful look. I bore this torment for nearly three months. Then I determined to find out who it was I had seen with my wife on that fatal evening.

“I went to town and straight to my false friend’s office. He cowered when he saw me, and when I bade him tell me who it was that we had seen with my wife, he tried to evade an answer.

“My hot blood was up in a moment. My trouble had made me reckless and desperate. Drawing a revolver, I took aim at his head. ‘Speak hound! or I will send you to your last account!’ The coward trembled and began,

“‘I had a grudge against you because Mabel preferred you to me. I hated to see your happiness. I watched for an opportunity to destroy



it. That night I had called at your house for you, and a servant told me you were on the lawn with Mrs. Lestrangle. Instead of letting the servant go for you, I went myself, and found your wife's companion was not you, but her brother, who had got into difficulty at college and had called on her to borrow some money, not daring to appeal to his father.'

" 'You knew this and dared deceive me?' I leapt upon him and knocked him senseless.

" This act cooled me and I walked away without offering further violence. I strode off to my home, hoping to find my wife there. The house was closed, my wife was gone, no one knew where. Heart-broken, cursing myself and my enemy, I went back to my mountain home. I have never been able to find her."

" Do not despair! All will come right yet," said Pansy, laying her soft cheek to his.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### LESLIE LATHROP'S SORROW DEEPENS

About a week after the disappearance of his daughter, Leslie sat in his study, sore at heart, and much dejected. He had just been reading a letter from Dr. Chandler, when Blanche came in.

"Have you news from Pansy?"

"No, it is from Dr. Chandler," Leslie answered sadly.

"Well, *I* have."

"You! What news have you from my child?"

A wicked, triumphant light shone in her eyes as she drew a letter from her pocket.

"Read this, and find out for yourself."

He took the letter.

"To my sworn enemy, Leslie Lathrop:

"At last I am even with you. You stole from me the girl I intended to marry. I stole from you the one you never intended I should marry. I defy the whole world to interfere.

"You may set every sleuth-hound of a detective after me, and again I defy every one of them to find me.

"I am repaid for waiting, as your daughter is more beautiful than her mother, and I am just as



much in love with her. She is a spirited little creature and hard-bitted, but I like her all the better for it. She don't quite like the idea of being an outlaw robber's wife; but she will have to come to it.

"I am more alive than ever before.

"Your affectionate son-in-law,

"SHARKY DANDY."

Leslie groaned.

"My child in the power of that monster! I would she were in her grave!"

Blanche was having her revenge.

Leslie at once placed the letter he had received from Sharky Dandy in the hands of the police.

"You shall have *every cent* of my fortune if you will find her!" he said.

After Pansy's disappearance, Mrs. Grant could not be induced to longer remain in Leslie's home. She set out for her former home with Mr. Le-strange. The cottage was empty and sadly in need of a woman's hands. She put it in order "against the master's return," she said.

The day Sharky had appointed for his wedding had come. He had told Pansy he was going for the minister, who resided quite a distance away, and would not be back until evening, when the marriage would take place.

"You refuse to restore me to my friends. Now hear me! Never can you force me to say the words which would make me your wife. You may



go through the farce of a marriage, but my tongue will be silent. Never! will I be your wife!"

"Don't be too sure, my pretty!"

Pansy was frantic and gave herself up to despair and grief. Then she thought of her grandfather. She dared not go to him now lest she be discovered, so she passed the day in agony.

An hour earlier than usual that evening she heard old Meg fumbling at the door, which she was long in unfastening. At last she came staggering into the room, as if very much intoxicated, omitting to relock it.

Pansy's heart gave a bound. Meg now being under the influence of liquor, perhaps she could slip out of the room and escape. Meg was nearly half way across the little apartment, when she suddenly remembered her laxness. She wheeled about quickly and secured it, putting the key in her pocket.

Pansy's hopes fell as suddenly as they had risen. Meg set the tea-tray on the table and became maudlin and talkative.

"We're goin' to have a weddin' to-night, so I've been cheerin' myself up with a little drop." Here she pulled a bottle of liquor from her dress-pocket. "Won't you have a little, Miss? Drinkin' to your own health and spirits?" and she offered a glass to Pansy.

An idea flashed into the girl's head. Meg was so far gone, it would take but little more to make



her drunk. She could scarcely control herself because of the hope that had sprung up.

"Ain't you goin' to take a little drink?" asked Meg.

"No," answered Pansy, "not this time."

"Ah, then next time." And Meg drained the contents of the glass, smacking her lips.

In a few moments her jaws dropped, her head fell, and she went into the deep sleep of intoxication.

Though Pansy was an advocate of temperance, she was glad to have the cup that inebriates do its work. Her heart beat so loud she could hear its thumping. She spoke to Meg and then shook her, but the hag did not waken.

Breathing a prayer to Heaven for courage and help, with trembling hands she drew from Meg's pocket the key of her prison. She snatched up her cloak and hat, took the lamp and in a moment was out of the room. Then she thought of her grandfather. She hesitated, but only for an instant.

"I cannot abandon grandpapa." She flew back, and taking a knife from the table, ran to him and began sawing at the ropes that bound him.

"Quick! Quick, grandpapa! Old Meg is in a drunken sleep, and we can get away. Hurry, before Sharky gets back!"

His bonds not giving way, Mr. Lestrangle said, "Pansy do not wait another instant. I will



follow as I can. If you escape, you can send assistance to me. Run, before it is too late!"

Pansy flung her arms about his neck and kissed him good-bye.

When she reached the open air, she breathed more freely. She looked about for the little path, previously described by her grandfather, and had no difficulty in finding it. She started on the run. Excitement kept her up, so she did not feel fatigue. On and on she went.

Presently she heard voices. The tones were muffled and directly in front of her. In the gloom she could see the advancing gang of men. She was so paralyzed with fear, that she could but crawl out of the path a little way into a clump of bushes.

The men came so close to her she could hear what they were saying. Would they discover her? As they passed her, she heard Sharky's voice,

"By the jumping stars, Dodger! Your clerical dress is quite becoming. It would deceive a more practiced eye than that of Sharky's bride elect. No doubt the marriage ceremony will be as binding as if done by one of those long-faced hypocrites."

The men laughed over Sharky's rude words. The truth came home to Pansy as she listened, in all its horrid nakedness.

She did not move from her hiding place until they were out of sight and hearing. Then breathing a prayer to her Heavenly Father for protec-



tion, she started on as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her.

Soon she struck a road running north and south. Instinct or Providence guided her northward. She reached the village of L—— just as the north-bound train was steaming in. Without a moment's reflection, save the one thought to get away as far as possible, she got on and did not stop till the train steamed into Montreal.



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### SHARKY DISAPPOINTED

So sure had Sharky been of his prize, he had not even counted on the possibility of her flight. In his exhilaration, he did not at once notice that Meg was not in the entrance room. When he did observe it, he proceeded to the inner apartment, devoted to his captive's use, to tell her all things were ready for their wedding.

He found the door unlocked, and there sat Meg snoring in her chair, the tell-tale bottle on the table beside her. An imprecation fell from his lips. Mad with disappointment and rage, he dealt the old woman a blow on the temple, with his powerful fist, sending her down on the hard floor with an awful thud.

He fumed and raged like a mad-man. Calling his men, he told them of his ill-luck, and ordered an immediate search.

"Bring her back to me and you shall have an extra thousand. Curse that old hag! It's her fault. She got something she won't get over soon," pointing to the insensible woman, who lay bruised and bleeding. "I guess the blow I gave her has settled her. Now let's be off."



All night long the men continued the search, only returning to report their ill-success.

"That girl is no fool," said Sharky, "and soon as she reaches home they will not be long in getting the police-force on our tracks. We have plenty of money and could keep an army at bay here, but I have no notion of wintering in this pesky hole. We will divide the spoils and scatter. Sam, go and fetch the old man, and let's have a peep at him."

The man did as he was bid, but soon returned alone. In his hand he held a scrap of paper which he handed to Sharky.

"What's the matter, Sam? You look as if you'd seen a ghost. What's this?" asked Sharky.

Mr. Lestrangle had written,

"Beware Sharky! and good bye. We part with you gladly, my granddaughter and I. When we meet again, we shall not be the ones who are the prisoners."

Sharky's look of bravado now changed to a crestfallen air.

"It's twice the old man's given me the slip. Well, that game is up. He will make it warm for us, now that he is loose. Let us up and away."

The robbers did not tarry or stand upon the order of their going.

Mr. Lestrangle had also been successful in making good his escape. Glad to be free, he directed his steps to his isolated home once more, sure that



his old enemy would not risk himself in that region long.

When he reached the house he was surprised to see it occupied. Finding the door unlocked he walked in. Mrs. Grant hearing footsteps met him just as he was entering. Seeing her frightened face he called out,

“It is I, and not my ghost, you see.”

“But you surprise me, sir!”

“How glad I am to find you here! I am so wearied and have been through so much.”

“Poor man, how changed!” and she set about making him comfortable.

His captivity, grief, and hardships brought on a serious illness. With much difficulty, Mrs. Grant secured the services of a physician. Mr. Lestrangle was too far gone to think connectedly, or to tell the story of Pansy’s imprisonment and escape.

Meantime, how was it with Pansy? Arrived in Montreal, her chief thought was to hide herself away, where neither her late persecutor, nor her supposed angry lover could find her.

Alone and friendless, a weight of sorrow on her young heart, what should she do? After partaking of slight refreshments, she retired to her room in the hotel where she was guest, and pondered the question.

“I must not waste time in bewailing my unhappy lot.”

At last she hit upon a plan. She determined to



disguise herself and return to New York. Sharky Dandy would not look for her there, and it might give her a chance to find out what opinion her father and lover had of her. She must find employment, too, for her purse would soon be empty.

In spite of her loneliness and trouble, she slept tolerably well. The next morning after breakfast, which she took in her room, she donned cloak and hat, tying a thick veil over her face; then going to the office, paid her hotel bill, and went out on the street.

She found her way to a shop, where she purchased a wig of short curly black hair, and a pair of blue spectacles. At a furnishing store, she bought the rest of the things needed to complete her disguise.

When arrayed in them, she was so completely changed in appearance, that she smiled with satisfaction over her reflection in the glass. She started at once for New York; there she obtained lodgings at a respectable boarding-house, where she assumed the name of Mary Abbott.

Anxious to learn of her grandfather, she wrote to the postmaster of L——, making inquiries concerning Mr. Lestrangle, giving the address of Harry Jones. The reply came, stating that Mr. Lestrangle was ill at his old home; but that there was hope of his recovery, being carefully nursed by his old housekeeper.

Pansy was becoming discouraged as the days passed and she found no employment. She



searched the advertising columns of the newspapers.

Every day since her return she had gone through this operation, in the hope of finding something to do; but either she thought herself unqualified to fill the situation, or else the work was not suited to her abilities. At last, one day, she caught sight of a notice which pleased her; however, there was one drawback in it for her. The person advertising required the applicant to be provided with a recommend. It read,

“Wanted — A young girl to act as companion to an invalid lady. References required. Mrs. M. B. will receive applicants at her rooms in W—— Hotel.”

Pansy's heart sank. What reference could she give? Tears of distress rose to her eyes, and she threw the paper aside with a deep sigh.

“But for that reference, I might obtain the situation.” Suddenly she brightened. “I have it! Pansy Lathrop shall write a recommend for poor distressed Mary Abbott.”



## CHAPTER XXXVII

### BACK TO NEW YORK

What had become of Mrs. Bentley and Mabel during these long years? When last we saw them, Mabel had completely recovered her memory, but, as we already know, with it came pain and disappointment.

Leslie had married again, and loved another, her baby was dead, her father was, she knew not where. Of course she might go back and claim her husband, but it would bring her no happiness, and would break up and destroy the peace of a household. Leslie had but done what she had advised, in asking that Blanche become his wife.

Her mother strove to soften her grief, surrounding her with every luxury and comfort. They traveled everywhere, yet Mabel still bore a heavy heart. But for her splendid physical constitution, she would have broken down entirely.

As years went by and no news of Mr. Lestrangle came, she concluded he was dead.

Now, because of Mabel's pleading, Mrs. Bentley had come back to America.

"I must have one more glimpse of Leslie ere I die. He need never know. He may never have



loved me. He may not have mourned much for me; but I can never forget him. One look into his dear face will make me happier than all else."

Mabel was now thirty-seven. She was even more beautiful than when Leslie had wooed her at her home in the Adirondacks.

Travel, culture and contact with refined people had changed the timid girl of eighteen into the self-possessed woman. She was one upon whom suffering leaves but few traces.

The strange part of their arrival in New York was that it took place the week of Pansy's disappearance from home.

The afternoon after their arrival, Mabel suddenly left her position by the window, where she had been eagerly watching the passers, scanning their features to see if among the myriads of goers and comers, she could find the one face she longed to see.

She remembered Leslie as young and happy, full of chivalry and goodness. She was not prepared to see lines of care and sorrow on the face she loved. She had no idea that his soft brown hair was now prematurely streaked with gray. He was far more changed than she.

"Mother, there is no use trying to hide my restlessness. You know that every minute which passes until I see him is a century. I must see him, and have made up my mind to go to his home this evening. You will accompany me, mother? Do not fear! I shall not faint or give myself



away in any manner whatever. I shall go well disguised. Luck has favored me. In the paper, this morning, I saw an advertisement saying Leslie Lathrop is in need of a housekeeper, and will receive applicants at his residence. I will pretend to be in want of the place and manage, not only to see him, but to speak with him. Then I will come back and take up my burden once more."

"I cannot refuse you, my dear, but I wish you might give up the plan," said Mrs. Bentley with a caress.

Toward evening, mother and daughter left the hotel in a cab, driving within easy walking distance of Leslie's home, when they alighted and proceeded on foot, bidding the cabman await their return.

Mabel felt a trembling weakness overcoming her, as they neared the remembered place.

"Mamma, pray that my strength last me through the ordeal."

As they walked up the broad avenue, Mabel caught her mother's arm as she whispered,

"He is in the library.— See, it is lighted. You stay here. I will see if he is alone."

She advanced to the open door, her heart wildly throbbing. With an iron will she fought against her weakness. Near the center table with the light falling on his careworn features, was Leslie.

"He looks miserable," thought Mabel. "Why is he alone and sorrowful?"

It was only by the strongest effort of her will



that she resisted the impulse of going to him, and crying out that she was dying for a word from his dear lips, one caress from his hand.

How she longed to comfort him! But no! she had no right, he belonged to Blanche.

Silently as she had come, she went back with tottering steps to her mother.

“I have seen him!” she said; “but he did not see me — and oh, mother! it was so hard to keep from him, he looks so sad and miserable.”



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE HAND OF FATE

“ ‘It is not a wise thing to play with fire.’ ” That is what Mabel has done. She is even more miserable than before she saw him. Yet how could I prevent her from going? ” So thought Mrs. Bentley some time after Mabel had gone to her husband’s home.

It was but too true. The sight of him had only made her heart more sore. Her mind was constantly at work, trying to solve the problem of his unhappiness. She began to see that if she must remain away from him, she could not have committed a graver error than to have executed that mad project of hers, in going to see him. The agony she had suffered since, made her ill; so much so, that Mrs. Bentley became alarmed.

Mabel could not be induced to leave her room. She scarcely tasted food and she became so weak that she would remain lying down most of the time. When her mother proposed calling in a physician, a weary smile came to her lips as she remarked,

“ All the physicians in the world cannot heal the wound here,” indicating her heart. “ Perhaps



God will pity me at last and take me home to Him, where there will be no misplaced affections, no deceit, no more aching hearts. I am weary of this world. But for the hope of a better one to come, I should have gone mad ere this."

"My dear child," mildly reproved Mrs. Bentley, "you should not take so dark a view of life."

Thinking of her own blighted one, she added,

"Although your trouble is great, there are many whose afflictions are yet greater than yours."

"You are right, mamma. Perhaps your own sorrow was even greater than mine. I have never heard you complain. You are a noble, unselfish woman. With one hand you stifle your own grief, that the other may minister to my wants. I must try to be more like you."

"Well," said Mrs. Bentley, anxious to change the subject, "to return to what I mentioned. Do you think it best to call in a doctor? You know the boy, Tom Chandler, who so miraculously saved your life, has become a famous doctor. Why not send for him? He might prescribe some tonic."

"You may do as you please, mamma, I should certainly like to see my life preserver; but I doubt if medicine can heal a broken heart."

So it happened that on the second day after his return to New York, Dr. Chandler was called on to visit Mabel. Mrs. Bentley had sent him a little note, telling him of her arrival in the city, and that her daughter was quite ill, begging him to call as soon as possible.



Dr. Chandler hastened to comply with the request. He was pleased to be able to meet Mabel and her mother again. Before going, he reckoned how much he owed Mrs. Bentley. Principal and interest amounted to a snug sum, but he was glad that he could acquit himself of this debt.

Ushered into Mabel's sitting room, and seeing the mother and daughter who so closely resembled his betrothed, it brought back all the desolation of his loss. Though he greeted the two ladies with joy, and told them what a pleasure it was to meet them again, they noticed something was wrong with him.

When he prepared to go, he left a prescription for Mabel, and advised that she engage a cheerful companion to arouse her drooping spirits.

Had Tom Chandler been a more curious man, he would have tried to find out the mystery surrounding these women; for he had not forgotten anything, not even the ghostly visit to the cemetery.

Upon leaving, he placed a sealed envelope in Mrs. Bentley's hand. When she found out what it contained she said,

"I might have known he would not rest until that was paid."

Mrs. Bentley, in obedience to his advice, put an advertisement in the papers for a companion for Mabel, the one that fell under Pansy's eyes and which she decided to answer in person.

When she arrived at the hotel to which it di-



rected, she was shown to Mrs. Bentley's room.

A number of persons had called, to secure the position, but none had been accepted. Pansy trembled with excitement, when ushered into Mrs. Bentley's presence. What if her plan should fail? What if they should discover that she was disguised?

As soon as she set eyes on Mrs. Bentley's face, she felt reassured. It seemed to her she had seen the dear lady before. Mrs. Bentley liked the girl at first sight. She offered her a seat, and after a little conversation, she asked to see the reference she had brought. With a trembling hand, Pansy gave her the paper she had written. Mrs. Bentley gave her a keen glance, as she read the signature. For some minutes she sat thinking.

"It will not do coming from there. The girl may tell things that will do Mabel harm." Silently she folded the paper, and handed it back to Pansy, saying,

"I am sorry but I do not think I shall need your services."

Tears of distress filled Pansy's eyes, and she said in a sorrowful tone, which reached Mable's ears in the next room,

"I am so sorry, madam, that I do not suit you. I did hope to get this place. I am confident I could be of help to the sick lady if you could only let me try."

Whether it was the sound of Pansy's sweet pathetic voice, or by some instinctive understanding



she was drawn towards her own, Mabel went to the door. She gazed earnestly into the fair young face, smiling pleasantly.

Pansy was struck with the resemblance the lady bore to the picture she had seen of her mother.

Turning to Mrs. Bentley, Mabel asked,

“Why were you going to send her away without consulting me? I have seen the other applicants and of all that came, this one is the best.”

Mrs. Bentley was confused.

“I like her, too, well enough — but — you see she, she is a mere child.”

“That is precisely why I want her. One whose life has not been blighted by sorrow,” interrupted Mabel.

Pansy smothered a sigh. The beautiful lady was mistaken, for sorrow had reached even her.

“Did you bring a recommend?” asked Mabel.

“Yes; but it seems to have caused Madam to decide against me.”

“Let me see it!” said Mabel.

Pansy handed it to her. There was a singular feature about Pansy’s signature to this reference. Neither had it been done intentionally. In signing her name, Pansy had merely put the initial of her given name, and it so much resembled the letter B, that Mrs. Bentley and Mabel thought the recommend came from Blanche Lathrop, which was lucky for Pansy.

As Mabel read, a hot flush suffused her face.

“I know, mother, why you did not accept this



young girl. But please let her try! If she can put up with our secluded life, I am sure I would like to have her with me."

Then turning to Pansy, who was now radiant with joy, she asked, "When can you come?"

"Tomorrow," eagerly responded Pansy.

The next day found her in her new quarters and performing her new duties.

While Mrs. Bentley took her afternoon nap, Pansy read to Mabel, whose mind wandered far from the reading. She was watching Pansy wondering how much she knew about the Lathrop family. What about Leslie's daughter? She was aroused from her reverie by the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

"It must be the doctor to see me," she said.

As the steps came nearer, Pansy's book slipped out of her hands and she felt her strength forsaking her.

"Will you ask mamma to come here? You may go to your room if you wish," said Mabel, not noticing her companion's agitation.

Glad of a chance of escape, Pansy hurried away.

"What a fright I have had," she said to herself.

"I wonder if I have been deceived. I was so sure it was his walk. I will find out if it is he. If so, I shall have to face the cold world once more."

So she tortured herself for a half hour, then Mrs. Bentley came and told her the doctor was gone and Miss Bentley desired her presence.

"Why child, how pale you are!" said Mabel,



as Pansy entered and sat down on a stool near her.

“Are you ill?”

“No, madam, I am quite well.” Anxious to divert Mabel’s attention from herself she said,

“I hope the doctor found you better.”

“My dear, there are ills which even as skillful a physician as Dr. Chandler is, cannot cure. I told him this afternoon that I do not require his attendance longer, and he had sense enough to own it.”

Pansy gave a little sigh of relief. Then she spoke with real sorrow and concern in her voice.

“I trust you are not so ill as that? You are young yet, and I hope with all my heart you will soon be quite well.”

Mabel shook her head.



## CHAPTER XXXIX

### MABEL'S REQUEST

Two weeks had now gone by since Pansy, in the character of Mary Abbott, became the constant companion of her mother. But neither her efforts, nor those of patient Mrs. Bentley, were able to heal Mabel's sickness of soul and body. Mabel herself looked upon death as near at hand.

"Mamma, I want to speak to you of something that has lately been on my mind. Like the dear patient mother you have always been, you will help me once more. They say that when death is near, a person's senses are sharpened and they see things in a clearer light. I have been thinking of late, whether I did right in keeping the secret of my existence from my husband. I did not, for I have been so wretched. If I am a judge of looks, Leslie was far from happy when I saw him. Chide me, call me weakminded and foolish, but I cannot die without speaking to him. I want to tell him how, through all these long, dark years, through all my doubts and grief, my love for him has burned pure and strong. Mother, will you go and ask him to come to me? Tell him he need not fear I shall



cause him any trouble; for my days are few on earth."

Mrs. Bentley was moved to tears. She knew that unless some great change should take place, Mabel must surely die soon. Her whole soul rebelled against the thought of summoning Leslie, who had caused all this trouble to her child; yet she could not find it in her heart to refuse this last request.

"I will go. I doubt if we did right," she was going to say, "in letting his crime go unpunished," but she simply added, "not to let him know before."

"Thank you, mother darling."

Mabel's face became transformed with happiness and peace. Mrs. Bentley would go to the end of the world to bring the faithless husband, if her daughter's face would only retain its happy look. Before leaving she called Pansy in her room and said,

"I am going away and shall be gone nearly all day. Do not let Miss Bentley brood in my absence."

"I will do my very best!" answered Pansy, and she hurried off to Mabel's room.

It was no easy task Mrs. Bentley had undertaken. She dreaded to meet the man for whom she had only bitter feelings. Mabel had sent her on an errand of peace; but in her soul it was war.

By the time she was ushered into the drawing



room of Leslie's home, she knew just how she would proceed. She was glad to find Leslie at home. She wrote on a piece of paper:

"Mr. Lathrop:

"I have news for you from some one you once cared for. M. B."

This she handed to the servant, to take to his master, who quickly responded.

He came to her all eagerness, thinking possibly his caller came with news of his lost Pansy.

"What ravages time has made in his face," thought Mrs. Bentley, as she met Leslie's scrutinizing gaze.

A smile of recognition lit up his features. He extended his hand saying,

"Mrs. Bentley, welcome! When last we met, you parted from me in anger."

"I know," said his visitor, "we did not part on very friendly terms; but that was long ago, time for many changes. You are not looking quite as well as then, Mr. Lathrop."

"No, I am not well. But where have you been hiding?" he asked. "We have tried hard to find you, but never were successful in the search."

"I returned from Europe in September," she answered.

"It cannot be that she knows," he thought.

"How can I ever tell her that my darling Pansy, Mabel's child, has been torn from me, by the cruel act of her step-mother?"



“I have not asked for your wife,” said Mrs. Bentley. “I would not like to have her go into hysterics again on my account.”

“Oh, do not fear,” answered Leslie. “She will not disturb you. She went away this morning and will not be back to-day.”

Mrs. Bentley breathed more freely, and summoning her courage she said,

“I have a request to make. Will you have the patience to listen to me, and hear me through without interrupting, no matter how startling my narrative may be?”

“I will — proceed,” he answered.

She then told Mabel’s story, from the time of her supposed death, down to that day, but disclosed no names.

There were traces of great agitation in Leslie’s face as she finished. Points of the narrative touched him; yet how could he connect the wild tale with his own life? Mrs. Bentley was surprised to see that, while there was pain and sorrow, he showed no signs of guilt.

“What do you think of a man who could commit such a crime?” asked she.

“The rope were too good for him!” cried Leslie, his honest face aglow with indignation.

“Then why did you do it?”

A look of horrified amazement came into Leslie’s face, and he sprang to his feet.

“Do what! Woman, are you mad, that you come to me with such an incredible tale of horror?”



What do you mean? It cannot be possible you accuse me of so horrible a crime! It cannot be true my darling Mabel still lives! For the love of Heaven, do not trifle!"

It was now Mrs. Bentley's turn to be surprised.

"Is it possible you had no knowledge of the wicked deed? No part in the attempted murder of my child?"

A look that Mrs. Bentley never forgot, came into Leslie's face.

"Can it be true! My wife drugged until she was thought dead! And *I* believed guilty! Did *she* believe it?"

"In truth, I cannot say she really did."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"Yes, Mabel is alive," said Mrs. Bentley, "and dying for one look, one word from you."

"Alive, and I not know it." His brow darkened and his hands clenched with the violence of his emotions. "Woe to them who dared harm her! How dared *you* do me so grievous a wrong as to keep my wife from me? But this is no time for reproach. Take me to her at once!"

At last the hours, which to Mabel were so weary and long, dragged away, and mother and husband arrived. Pansy had just time to step into Mrs. Bentley's room, adjoining Mabel's, when they entered. Leslie was by her bed-side and had his long lost wife in his arms.

"Oh, Leslie! my love, you have come at last!"

Just then a sound as of a falling body reached



them from the other room, and Mrs. Bentley hastened to ascertain the cause. Judge of her surprise when she found Pansy senseless upon the floor.

Mrs. Bentley's cry brought Leslie upon the scene. He raised the young girl and carried her to a sofa. The blue glasses had dropped from Pansy's eyes, and now that Leslie could see her face, he was struck with the resemblance to Pansy. But for the locks of jet, he could have sworn it was she. By this time, Mrs. Bentley had brought some water and Mabel had followed her to the room.

"She has only fainted," remarked Mrs. Bentley as she proceeded to bathe Pansy's temples. In so doing, the wig of black curls got disarranged and out peeped the golden locks beneath.

Leslie now snatched the false hair from her head. A cry of joy burst from his lips as he recognized his child. Mabel and Mrs. Bentley looked on with surprise.

"Prepare for fresh joy, my darling," said Leslie to Mabel. "I see it cannot be kept from you long."

In a few moments Pansy opened her eyes, and catching sight of her father's happy face, called out,

"Papa, my own dear papa!"

He stooped down and kissed her sweet lips.

"My dear child, why did you hide from me?" he asked.

Pansy, who had now regained consciousness, sat



up and clasping her arms around his neck, burst into tears.

"Papa, you did not blame me?"

Seeing the mystified look on the faces of Mrs. Bentley and Mabel, she suddenly remembered her disguise and the cause of her swoon.

"What does it mean? You always told me my mother was dead; but if I heard aright, this dear lady," indicating Mabel, "is my mother."

"There is much to explain all around; but not just yet." Taking her hand and placing it in Mabel's, Leslie said,

"Dear wife, can you bear the surprise? This is our child. Pansy, this is your mother. Mrs. Bentley is your grandmother Lestrangle."

The reunion was joyful and sacred to the parties concerned. Then silence reigned for a few moments, silence caused by overjoyed hearts. Leslie was the first to speak.

"We all have a story to tell, and when all is made clear, we shall find all this suffering springs from the vindictiveness of two unscrupulous persons, whom I mean to deliver up to justice."

Mabel shuddered. Pansy looked imploringly at her father. His words brought back the cruel imprisonment of herself and grandfather, and their escape. She glanced in the direction of her newly found grandmother. Going to her, she put her arms around her neck and said,

"Dear grandmamma, I have good news for you and mamma. The joy of finding you both and



seeing papa again, made me forget all but my happiness. You will be surprised when I tell you that I know where grandpapa Lestrangle is."

Mrs. Lestrangle, whom we will now call by her real name, was amazed on hearing this announcement. To Mabel, the news was a fresh source of joy. She clasped her hands together and exclaimed,

"God be praised! Not only husband and child found, but my father, too! Heaven has been merciful to me."

The maid now made her appearance with the tea tray. Mrs. Lestrangle had ordered an extra cover for Leslie, and soon there was a tempting little supper set in the pleasant sitting room. Mabel even declared that she felt hungry.

"It will not be long," Leslie remarked, "before we shall see the roses back in your cheeks. We will soon have you home again, blooming as of old."

Mabel's face changed color. She thought about what was to be done with Blanche. Much as the latter had wronged her, she pitied the woman who had brought so much humiliation upon herself. Mabel was angelic enough to beg mercy for her.

After tea, Leslie despatched a messenger for Dr. Chandler. When Leslie told him what had happened, he exclaimed,

"What a burning shame! I shall give myself no rest until I have found that coward. If I were you, my friend, I would not show much mercy to



that woman who has been a curse to you and yours."

"Much as she deserves full punishment for her atrocious crimes, I regret that she must go unpunished," replied Leslie. "My wife is as merciful as Blanche is merciless, and she has begged me to let her go free."

It was agreed upon between the two men that Dr. Chandler should start in search of Mr. Lestrangle and bring him and Mrs. Grant to New York as soon as Mr. Lestrangle should be well enough to travel.



## CHAPTER XL

### BLANCHE MEETS WITH AN ACCIDENT

On the second day after his departure, Dr. Chandler returned, and with him Mr. Lestrangle and Mrs. Grant.

We will not attempt to describe the meeting between Mr. and Mrs. Lestrangle. Peace once more reigned, and all was forgiven and forgotten in that blissful hour of reunion.

Leslie had not been home since he had left it with Mrs. Lestrangle. It was pitiful to see how anxiously he watched over Mabel, anticipating her every wish. And it was wonderful how fast she regained strength. Happiness was better than medicine.

In the midst of their preparations for departure for home, a servant of Leslie's arrived in great haste. As soon as he could get breath to speak, he said:

"Mr. Lathrop, we have been looking all over for you, and it is dreadful news I bring you."

"What has happened?" demanded Leslie, seeing that the man hesitated to tell.



“ Oh, it’s awful news,” responded the man, “ an awful accident has happened to Mrs. Lathrop. You know she went away the same day you did. None of us knew where; but she went on the train. The next day, when she was coming back, the train got run into. Mr. Harley was in the same coach. He escaped unhurt, but Mrs. Lathrop got injured awful bad. Mr. Harley had her brought home; but she was insensible, and stayed so until this morning. All that time, none of us knew where to find you. The doctor says there’s not much hope. This morning she is conscious and asked for you.”

When the man had finished speaking, Leslie said, “ Go home and say I will soon be there.”

The servants all loved their master, but none liked Blanche, for she had ruled over them in tyrannical fashion. They declared that, after all, if she did die, they could not feel for her as for a kind mistress.

“ Surely,” added John, “ the master will not be vexed any longer with her vixen tongue. What a pity that the first mistress did not live. I expect things would have gone on different.”

They were discussing this subject, when they heard carriage wheels on the driveway, and saw two cabs stopping before the door. From the first one their master alighted. Then he helped three ladies out. One they instantly recognized as Pansy, though she, like the others, was thickly veiled. Out of the second carriage, came Dr.



Chandler, Mrs. Grant and Mr. Lestrangle, the latter looking so pale and ghostlike that one of the servants remarked,

“They have brought him from the valley and the shadows.”

When Leslie informed them who the people were he had brought, astonishment and joy reigned supreme. They all gathered in the hall to welcome back the lost ones found.

The thought that Mr. Lathrop's first wife was still alive and was now in the house with her father and mother and Pansy, was a source of great rejoicing.

It was somewhat embarrassing for Leslie to think of having two wives living under the same roof. Yet it was no fault of his.

“You must go to her now,” said Mabel. Placing her hand on his shoulder, she raised her eyes imploringly to his and said, “Remember your promise. You are to forgive all.”

“You are too good!” he exclaimed, stooping and kissing her fondly. “For your sake, my darling, I will be merciful,” and he proceeded to Blanche's room.

What a sight met his gaze as he entered.

“Can it be possible this is the once beautiful Blanche?”

Her head was bandaged. There was an ugly cut on her left temple and several bruises on her livid face. Her eyes already had the glassy stare peculiar to the dying, and her breath came in



labored gasps. Leslie shuddered. Soon as she saw him, she said,

“I am so glad you have come. It is none too soon, for I am sinking fast.” She motioned him to a seat near her.

“Leslie,” she said, in slow and difficult speech, “I was so afraid I would die without seeing you, and I have a terrible confession to make. First of all, let me tell you, you need fear my brother no longer. He has gone to Australia. The other day, when I left home, it was to go and see him, and I met this accident coming back.”

She then commenced a recital of her crimes, when Leslie stopped her, saying,

“I know all you would confess and more too. Spare yourself the trouble.”

In her weak condition, she did not think it strange that he knew. She simply said,

“Knowing all my wickedness, can you find it in your heart to forgive me?”

This woman who had bitterly, cruelly wronged him, filled his life with misery, now dared ask for forgiveness. It was almost more than he could do; but he remembered his promise and said,

“Blanche, for the sake of those you have wronged, I do forgive you.”

“‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’” she cried in failing accents.

That night she passed from this world to the presence of One, who shows mercy to the sinner, though repentance comes at the eleventh hour.



## CHAPTER XLI

### CONCLUSION

The news that Leslie's first wife was still alive and at home, and that Pansy and Mr. Lestrangle had been found, was soon spread among Mr. Lathrop's friends.

He deemed it right to make some explanation of the strange events that had so lately taken place at his home. Only what was absolutely necessary was told. Nevertheless, many wrong conjectures and conclusions were drawn.

A great many people took Blanche's burial as an occasion to satisfy their curiosity as to the truth of the rumors afloat. It was a nine days' talk and wonder.

Not many hearts were made sad by Blanche's death. According to the world's shallow method of paying homage to wealth and beauty, she had seemed to have a large circle of friends and admirers; but it is doubtful if one genuine tear was shed over her going. As for those she had so greatly wronged, they never mentioned her name except in a charitable way.

It was wonderful to see how rapidly Mabel improved. It was as Mr. Lathrop had predicted.



The roses soon bloomed in her cheeks. In a month she had completely regained her health. Of the two, it was difficult to tell which was the loveliest, mother or daughter. Mabel's long years of patient suffering had brought to her face that sweet expression which made her look supernaturally beautiful.

As for Leslie, Heaven had opened for him. Mr. Lestrangle also rapidly gained strength and health. He and his wife could not be parted from each other for a day. It was as if they were striving to make up for the lost years spent in miserable estrangement.

Dr. Chandler often joked with Mabel about the time when a lad of fifteen he had thought himself desperately in love with her.

"And I believe, mamma," said Pansy teasingly, "that he never quite forgot the idol of his youth; for he told me one day about his boyish affection for you in a way that made me feel quite jealous. Seriously, mamma, it did."

Both Mabel and Dr. Chandler laughed heartily at this.

Three months later, Pansy and Dr. Chandler were quietly married. On their wedding day Mrs. Lestrangle gave Pansy a check for more than the amount of what Dr. Chandler had paid her for his supposed debt. This with the rest of the gifts from the other members of the family made up quite a fortune.



After the wedding, Leslie closed up his house and the bridal couple, accompanied by Mrs. Chandler, Mr. and Mrs. Lestrangle, Mr. and Mrs. Lathrop, started on a trip to Europe. They remained abroad for two years and when they returned, all settled down in New York.

Mrs. Chandler lived with her son, and she learned to love Pansy as her own daughter.

Good Mrs. Grant remained at Leslie's home where she was treated as a member of the family.

Every year the party spent the summer months at Mr. Lestrangle's old home, in the Adirondacks, which was enlarged for their accommodation. Dr. Chandler and his wife lived to tell their children and grandchildren about the robbers' cave.

In time, the track leading to the cave was lost; but it might be of interest to the many who now visit the mountains to make a search for it. It is a fact that ever since those aristocratic people have spent their summer there, thousands have followed their example, and no lovelier place can be found than the beautiful spot on which stood the cottage home of one of the heroes of this story.















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